

Fiction

Group 5





Racing Hearts

Buddhist Sin Tak College, Li, Hei Hang – 17

“The Sun goes up and the Sun goes down, I drag myself into the town...”

That’s the lyrics from The Servant’s single “Cells.” Sums up most of our lives, pretty much, really. Doing things that we are most likely not gonna like, to “work for a living” per se. But that doesn’t quite cut it for me. I am not satisfied with my life being a part of a lifeless society—Hong Kong, and living my life fruitlessly, having no sparks or glory whatsoever. I have to live for something...or someone. I have to be different in this ordinary world. I have to be something else.

My name is Marcus Lee. And to give you some understanding as to how I live my current life differently, I am currently a Formula One racing driver For Scuderia Toro Rosso, Italian for Red Bull Racing. My racing number is 26...if you even cared. As for how I achieved this at such a young age of 23, it’s a really long story...Basically, I had to take my very own journey to the west.

I was a kid full of dreams. I grew up watching the likes of Lewis Hamilton, Fernando Alonso, and of course Sebastien Vettel, racing their asses off in those mesmerizing Formula One cars. I wanted to be the same. I wanted to be on the top step of the podium, and proudly looking towards to the sky, as if I was thinking about somebody while my country’s national anthem was played through the speakers on the stage and all over the track. But it was practically impossible for me, being so poor in Hong Kong.

But I did. Otherwise I wouldn’t be talking to you in this manner. As much as my parents fully respected my decision to drop out of school at the age of 16, I had to borrow a huge amount of money, and find somewhere with decent racing supremacy to nurture my racing instinct, and to become what I wanted to be—a racing driver.

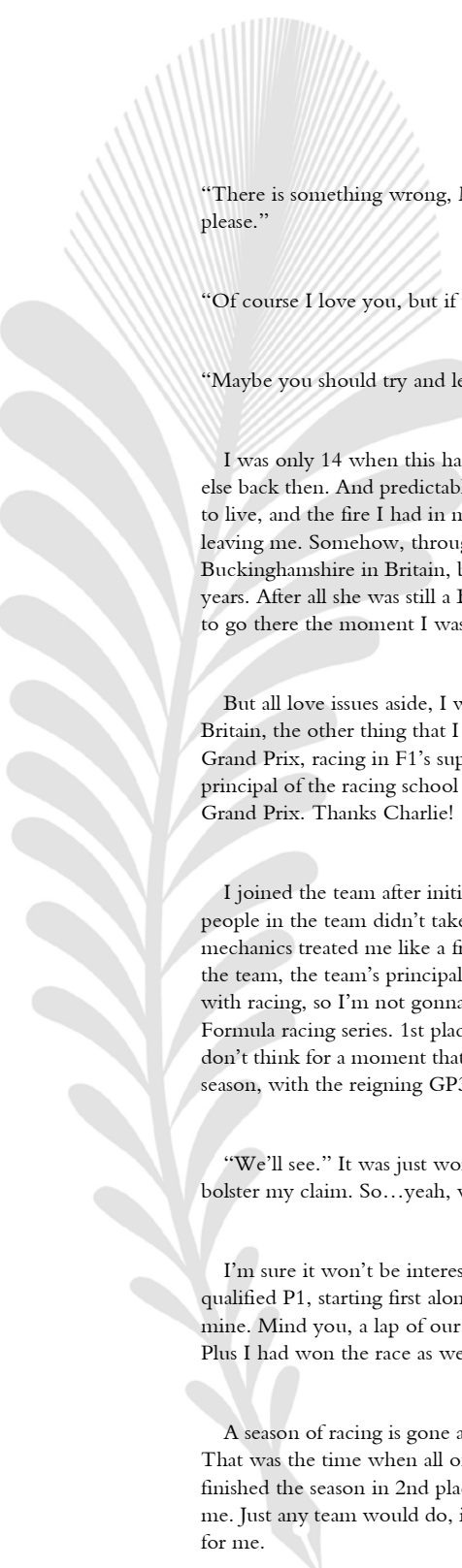
Naturally the ideal place would be Britain. They have the best racing royalties. 7 of the 10 currently competing Formula One teams have their headquarters located there. To add to that, Britain has shaped countless legendary F1 world champions. Lewis Hamilton, Jenson Button, James Hunt etc. I was eager to stand amongst them. “But wait,” you may think, “Isn’t Italy the place for aspiring racing drivers? Or even Germany? With Ferrari and Lamborghini originating in Italy, and Mercedes in Germany?” Mind you, you have a point. Both Mercedes and Ferrari are competing in the F1, and they are at the very top of the game, with Mercedes winning the last 4 titles, in both constructors’ and drivers’ championships. Ferrari was even more prominent in the sport, with 16 constructors’ title and 15 drivers’ championships. Well, you still remember at the very beginning I told you that I had to live for something...or someone? That certain “someone” is not in either of those countries....

“I think maybe it’s time for us to split up and calm our heads...” I still remember how this sentence struck me 9 years ago...

“But why?...things are going fine!...”

“No they aren’t...let’s say that I have finally figured out what my mind is thinking...we just aren’t meant to be together maybe...I mean, I’m leaving Hong Kong anyway...”

“What? Where?? You didn’t tell me this before!..Is there something wrong, Kate?”



“There is something wrong, Marcus...in our relationship...and my life...just don’t ask if you love me, please.”

“Of course I love you, but if you’re not beside me then what’s the point of all of this?”

“Maybe you should try and let me go...I’m sure you will someday...”

I was only 14 when this happened. Call it petty love all you want. But that struck me like nothing else back then. And predictably, I still haven’t let go...even up till now. For a while I lost all motivation to live, and the fire I had in my heart to be different was put out temporarily by the sadness of Kate leaving me. Somehow, through her friends, I figured out where she was going. She moved to Buckinghamshire in Britain, because her British father thought that she had to study in UK for a few years. After all she was still a British, even if her mother was a Hong Konger. Back then I made a wish to go there the moment I was able to do so. I just didn’t think that it would become a reality.

But all love issues aside, I was here for one thing...well two things. And back when I first landed in Britain, the other thing that I came for was the first priority. So I contacted a team manager from ART Grand Prix, racing in F1’s support series GP2. Now that I think of it, I really have to thank the principal of the racing school who allowed me to enrol. It was him who gave me the contacts to ART Grand Prix. Thanks Charlie!

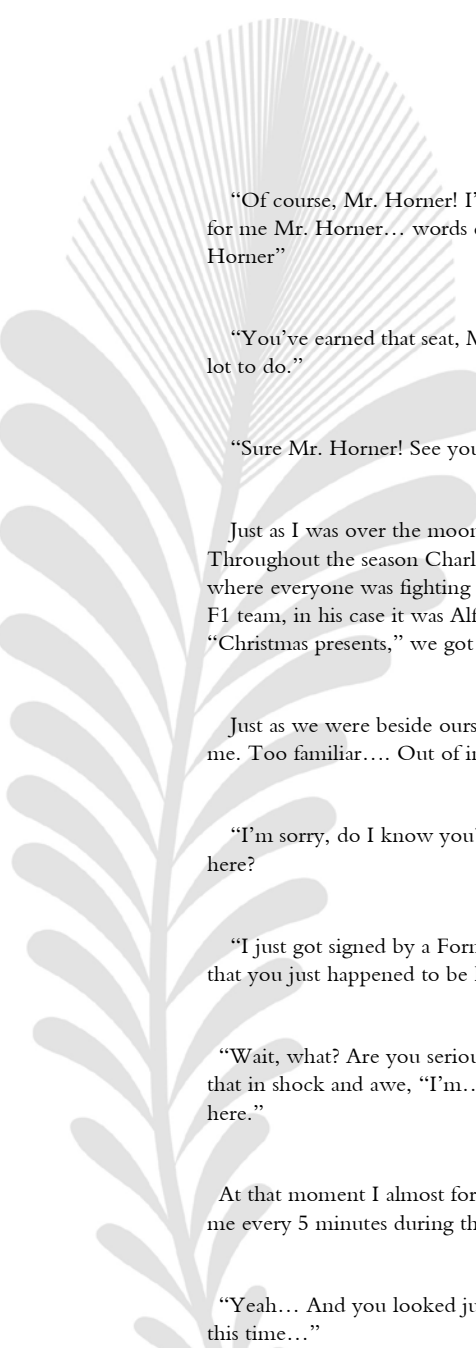
I joined the team after initial pre-season testing as the 2nd driver for the 2016 season. But at first people in the team didn’t take me seriously, with me being Asian and all. But I wasn’t afraid. My mechanics treated me like a friend of theirs, but not a good driver. When I took the first briefing from the team, the team’s principal didn’t hide his feelings, “Alright listen up rookie, I know you are in love with racing, so I’m not gonna go through the formality of introducing you to the points system of Formula racing series. 1st place gets 25 points, 2nd place 18, 3rd place 15...you know all of this. But don’t think for a moment that it’ll be a cruise down the streets. You’re in for some stiff competition this season, with the reigning GP3 Champion Charles Leclerc being your teammate, Tough Luck, kid.”

“We’ll see.” It was just words that I spitted out in the heat of the moment. But I’ve got the skills to bolster my claim. So...yeah, we’ll see.

I’m sure it won’t be interesting for you do sit through my races in full details. So in short, I had qualified P1, starting first alongside my teammate Charles, whose lapttime was 1.5 seconds down on mine. Mind you, a lap of our race usually takes around 90 seconds or so, so 1.5 seconds is a huge gap. Plus I had won the race as well. So...let’s just say that they then treated me like a real racing driver.

A season of racing is gone as fast as it came. And with it comes the long wait of off-season downtime. That was the time when all of us GP2 drivers wait for the call from the big teams – those F1 teams. I finished the season in 2nd place, tied with my teammate. I was hoping that one of those calls was for me. Just any team would do, it didn’t need to be Ferrari, or Mercedes! Just a team in F1 is good enough for me.

And you know what? I got my call on the Boxing Day! What an excellent gift from Santa it was! It was from Red Bull Racing’s team principal, Christian Horner. And I still remember what he told me, “Hey kid, you were phenomenal in GP2. Winning your debut race really did get our attention. We closely followed your results over the course of this season. Ready for the big time? I can give you a drive in the B team next season if you fancy.”



“Of course, Mr. Horner! I’ve been working so hard for this! You giving me a seat means so much for me Mr. Horner... words can’t even explain how happy I am right now... Th...thank you, Mr. Horner”

“You’ve earned that seat, Marcus. Come on over to our base Melton Keynes next week, we’ve got a lot to do.”

“Sure Mr. Horner! See you there!”

Just as I was over the moon about this something even more marvellous happened to me. Throughout the season Charles had slowly become my friend despite the fierce competition in GP2, where everyone was fighting for those 20 seats in F1. It turned out that Charles was also signed by an F1 team, in his case it was Alfa Romeo Sauber that called him. As soon as we knew about each other’s “Christmas presents,” we got together to celebrate in a pub just beside Silverstone.

Just as we were beside ourselves with joy in the pub, I saw an oddly familiar shadow walk right past me. Too familiar.... Out of instinct, I yelled “Kate? Are you Kate!?”

“I’m sorry, do I know you?... Oh wait... it’s YOU! It’s been a long time! Why on earth are you here?”

“I just got signed by a Formula One team! I’m now an F1 driver, Kate! It must be a gift from god that you just happened to be here to share this moment with me!”

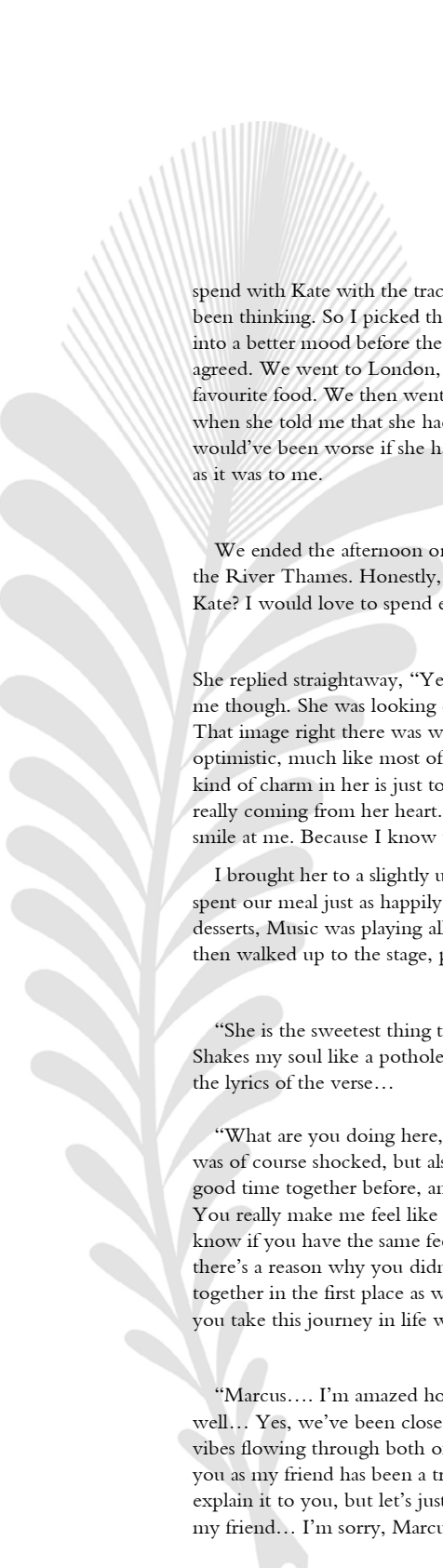
“Wait, what? Are you serious? Congratulations! I mean, you really did fulfil your dreams!” She said that in shock and awe, “I’m... I’m free right now, I think. Just finished a drink with my friends over here.”

At that moment I almost forgot that Charles was right next to me, “Is this the girl you mentioned to me every 5 minutes during the whole season? Wow, she is stunning!”

“Yeah... And you looked just as good as last time I saw you... I have so much to say to you after all this time...”

We got along quite well off-season, and when I was away, testing, racing and everything, she would come to my races. In many ways, I felt like the relationship between Kate and I got better and better, to a point where it felt like we were even closer than back when we were kids...Maybe that’s what she meant when she said “Things weren’t going well” back then. Anyway, this kept on going for 3 years. I spent my time driving for Toro Rosso when there were races, and hanging out with her when I was free, as if we were both feeling the vibes again like we had before. We often bantered with each other, and generally spent some great times together as well. We were so close in fact, the commentators of F1 started to mistake her as my actual girlfriend when she came to my races. Those were some great times we had spent together, like I haven’t mentioned this enough.

And now it’s the 2017 season, with all the pre-season rule changes, everyone had to adapt to the brand new and completely different cars. I got used to the new spec quite quickly, and become a consistent point scorer in this season, driving Toro Rosso STR12. With me finishing the previous race in P4, I’ve never felt stronger before. And it being the British Grand Prix, I had some extra time to



spend with Kate with the track being so close to our homes. I felt like it was time to tell her what I had been thinking. So I picked the day before the Grand Prix's Friday practise sessions, just to get myself into a better mood before the race. I asked her to spend a day with me. Not knowing my intention, she agreed. We went to London, had some fine Spaghetti Bolognese together, which is our common favourite food. We then went to Buckingham Palace to do some sightseeing. Kate actually surprised me when she told me that she hadn't visited this place before, she said she wouldn't do this tourist stuff. It would've been worse if she had been there before anyway, because it wouldn't be as interesting to her as it was to me.

We ended the afternoon on the London Eye. Inside the cabin, we got to see the sun set right above the River Thames. Honestly, the views just wasn't gonna get any better, "Do you like the views here, Kate? I would love to spend every day like this, never mind the F1 and everything..."

She replied straightaway, "Yeah... It would be nice if every day was like this..." She wasn't looking at me though. She was looking out at the sun, smiling so broadly that almost all her teeth were showing. That image right there was what got me loving her in the first place. She wasn't always happy and optimistic, much like most of us. But when she was, she would be the happiest girl on the planet. That kind of charm in her is just too bright to be hidden. I could feel that every time she smiled like it was really coming from her heart. That's what I like about her. I would trade everything just to see her smile at me. Because I know that's her true feelings.

I brought her to a slightly upmarket restaurant that I booked the week before for our dinner. And we spent our meal just as happily as we had been the whole day. And just when we were finishing our desserts, Music was playing all of a sudden, it was Ed Sheeran's "Hearts Don't Break Around Here." I then walked up to the stage, picked up the microphone, and started to sing.

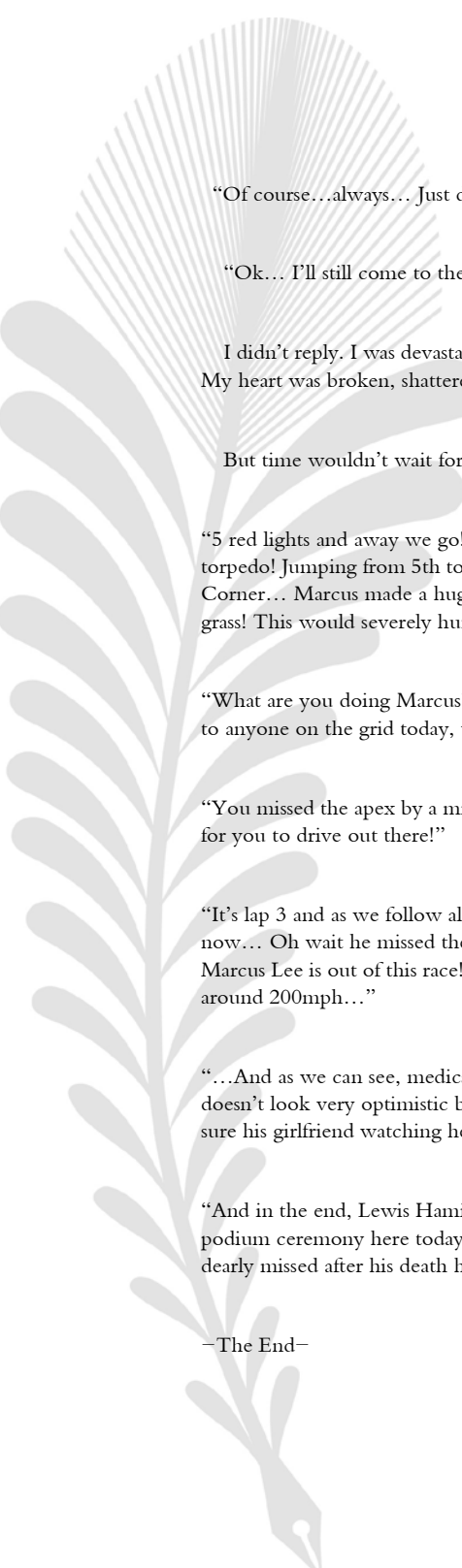
"She is the sweetest thing that I know, you should see the way she holds me when the lights go low. Shakes my soul like a pothole everytime..." the spotlight panned towards her when I whispered out the lyrics of the verse...

"What are you doing here, Marcus?! Come back down quickly before we get into any trouble!" She was of course shocked, but also a bit blushed because of my actions, "You know, we've spent so much good time together before, and we spent some good times together again now that we're in Britain. You really make me feel like we were back in the old days again...when were still a couple. I don't know if you have the same feeling as well, but I really feel like I'm in love with you again. I'm sure that there's a reason why you didn't love me anymore. But there are very good reasons why we got together in the first place as well. After so much we've been through I've become a different man. Will you take this journey in life with me again?"

"Marcus... I'm amazed how much you've done for me...and I don't know how to thank you as well... Yes, we've been close. We've spent some good time together too. And frankly, I could feel the vibes flowing through both of us as well. But I just don't think that we should be together... Having you as my friend has been a true blessing for me. And I'd like to keep it that way. I don't know how to explain it to you, but let's just say that there would be less of a burden on our relationship if you were my friend... I'm sorry, Marcus."

I went silent. In fact, the whole place went silent. I was stunned for a few seconds before I could say anything, "You know, I'm not gonna lie to you, I am not fine right now, after hearing you say this. But I know that I can't force you to love me as well. It's ok for you to reject me."

"Could we still be friends, Marcus? I'm really sorry about this..."



“Of course...always... Just don't say sorry to me... It's not gonna change anything...”

“Ok... I'll still come to the race... just don't do anything stupid for now, you hear me?”

I didn't reply. I was devastated. I just couldn't figure out a way to fight the depression even if I had to. My heart was broken, shattered that day... 3 days ago to be exact.

But time wouldn't wait for me to recover. And now it is race day.

“5 red lights and away we go! And as the lights go out, the Toro Rosso of Marcus Lee launched like a torpedo! Jumping from 5th to 2nd as we head down to turn 1... And as we head to the fearsome Stowe Corner... Marcus made a huge mistake! Missing the breaking point and running wide out onto the grass! This would severely hurt his chances to score a podium here!”

“What are you doing Marcus? Focus, focus! I haven't seen you in this shape before, you haven't talked to anyone on the grid today, what's going on?” My pit engineer talked to me through the radio.

“You missed the apex by a mile again, Marcus! You have to get yourself together, or else it's dangerous for you to drive out there!”

“It's lap 3 and as we follow along Marcus Lee in his Toro Rosso STR12, again coming to Stowe now... Oh wait he missed the apex again... Oh and he understeered off the track...and into the wall! Marcus Lee is out of this race! That was a huge shunt as well, since we normally head down to Stowe at around 200mph...”

“...And as we can see, medical personnel are rushing to the scene right now... And in all honesty it doesn't look very optimistic back here, seeing that the whole front end of the car had come off... I'm sure his girlfriend watching here would be devastated.”

“And in the end, Lewis Hamilton WINS the 2017 British Grand Prix! But sadly there will be no podium ceremony here today, as we mourn the loss of our beloved talent, Marcus Lee, who will be dearly missed after his death here today at Silverstone.”

—The End—

Secrets of the Wu Triplets

Buddhist Sin Tak College, Mok, Ka Hei – 17

The rain fell softly on the plants in the garden. The pitter-patter of the rain created a shield around Wu's family's triplets. Today was definitely not a good day for playing outside. The triplets were sitting in their study, doing their homework given by their father. The eldest brother, Kong, cupped his chin, watching the rainy garden. His homework was spread out on his table. None of it was done. The second eldest brother, Neng, was leaning on the table, sleeping. Only the little brother, Jing, was working hard, struggling to finish his homework.

'It's so boring! I don't want to do any homework anymore,' Kong suddenly yelled. His sound was so loud that it woke Neng up.

'Brother, I know you must have a plan to help us escape from this homework mischance,' Neng asked, rubbing his eyes. Kong didn't answer but stared at a room nearby. It was their father's study, a forbidden room for them. Knowing Kong's idea, Neng's eyes sparkled like stars, hoping to take action immediately.

Hearing his two brothers' words, Jing rolled his eyes and said, 'Don't be silly you two. Father will punish us if he knows we have sneaked into his room!'

Kong just giggled and tried to tempt his little brother, 'But Jing, don't you want to see what books are stored in dad's study? I know you have wanted to enter dad's room for a long time.' Jing only struggled for a few seconds and then put down his homework, looking at his eldest brother with expectancy. It seemed that he had succumbed to Kong's plan.

Kong opened the door slightly, looking around to make sure no one would notice them. They bent over, sneaking into their father's study one by one. They were so careful that not a single sound was made and no one knew that the triplets had left their own study.

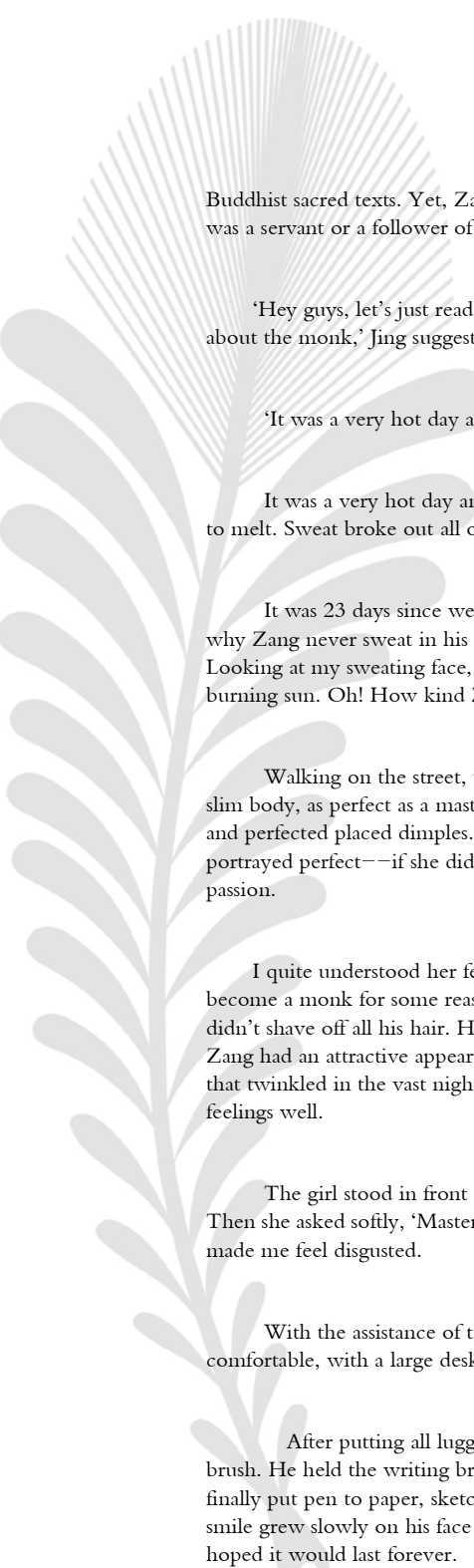
Two huge bookshelves which were full of books were placed at the two sides of the room, and in the middle was a desk full of documents and papers. The triplets were extremely excited to enter this forbidden area. Jing was the most excited one. Once he entered the room, he picked a book, reading and wanting to absorb as much knowledge as he could. His two brothers were not as studious as Jing. They just walked around, looking for something interesting.

When Neng walked near the desk, he saw a book. It was covered with no title and its colour was fading. It must be a book written a long time ago. 'Maybe there are some secrets written in it,' Neng thought, thumbing through the pages. Yet, he couldn't understand it as the words were outdated and no longer in use.

Neng frowned and said, 'Kong, I found a novel, but I don't know what it says.'

Kong read the book for a while and scolded, 'Idiot. It's a dairy. Um, I think it's a dairy from the Tang Dynasty.'

'Tang Dynasty! Really? Let me have a look,' Jing shouted suddenly. He immediately put down the book he was reading and took the dairy. The more he read, the more excited he felt. He raised his chin and was in pure glee. It was a diary about a monk called Zang going on a trip to the West for some



Buddhist sacred texts. Yet, Zang wasn't the owner of this diary. It seemed that the owner of this diary was a servant or a follower of Zang.

'Hey guys, let's just read this diary to kill time. It should be interesting. I hope to know more about the monk,' Jing suggested. Kong and Neng looked at each other and nodded.

'It was a very hot day and ...'

It was a very hot day and the sun shone brightly, burning like a freshly lit fire. I felt I was going to melt. Sweat broke out all over my body and finally dropped to the ground.

It was 23 days since we started the journey and it was also the twenty-third time I wondered why Zang never sweat in his heavy monk robes. Luckily, we had arrived at a little village before noon. Looking at my sweating face, Zang decided to stay in this little village for a little while to avoid the burning sun. Oh! How kind Zang was, and again, I was glad that I had met him in my life.

Walking on the street, we were trying to find an inn, and I saw a girl coming to us. She had a slim body, as perfect as a master's sculpture. Black hair framed a heart-shaped face with a gentle smile and perfected placed dimples. Her skin was completely flawless. Everything part of her would have portrayed perfect—if she didn't stare at Zang in that way with her eyes, sparkling with love and passion.

I quite understood her feelings. Zang was a monk, but not a 'real' monk. I knew he chose to become a monk for some reasons, hiding a fact that would not be accepted by others. As a result, Zang didn't shave off all his hair. His worry was doomed to follow him his whole life. Not cutting his hair, Zang had an attractive appearance, letting you feel relieved, calm and safe. For me, he was a distant star that twinkled in the vast night sky, so far that he was sacred and out of reach. So I understood her feelings well.

The girl stood in front of Zang, staring at him as if she wanted to capture all the details of Zang. Then she asked softly, 'Master, are you finding an inn? I can help you.' Her voice was so "sweet" that it made me feel disgusted.

With the assistance of the girl, we found an inn and decided to take a rest there. The room was comfortable, with a large desk and two comfortable chairs. We still had time before having lunch.

After putting all luggage down, Zang pulled out a piece of paper, an ink stick and a writing brush. He held the writing brush with a slight tilt, while frowning to himself. After a few seconds, he finally put pen to paper, sketching. In the beginning, he hesitated. Then, he drew faster and faster. A smile grew slowly on his face and his eyes were as gentle as a silent lake. This scene calmed me and I hoped it would last forever.

The sound of someone knocking on the door broke the silence. It was that girl, holding a tray of food, all vegetables, of course. Oh! I couldn't stop rolling my eyes. Didn't she know that Zang didn't want to be disturbed when he was drawing? If Zang needed to have lunch, I would prepare it for him, not that girl.

'Be polite, Long,' Zang said, seeing me rolling my eyes. He put his palms together and thanked the girl. A faint pink flush coloured her cheeks immediately. She put down the tray and lowered her head to avoid eye contact with Zang. She stood a few steps away and seemed to want to say some words.



‘What’s the matter, lady?’ I asked irritably.

She lowered her head more and asked with curiosity, ‘Master, where are you going to?’

‘Madam, we are going to the West for some Buddhist sacred texts,’ Zang answered.

The girl was trying to say something but I chipped in, ‘Please leave, lady. We want to enjoy the meal now.’ After hearing my words, the girl started to walk out but turned back to look repeatedly. Before she closed the door, Zang looked into her eyes and she blushed again.

The door was closed completely and I was glared at by Zang. I would do anything for just a simple smile. After a while, he sighed and sat down, and started to have his lunch. To be honest, I didn’t like the girl, especially when she was looking at Zang with extreme passion and love. It made me feel annoyed and jealous.

After the meal, it was time for us to continue our trip. Picking up all our luggage, we left the inn and this little village. Suddenly someone shouted, ‘Please wait, master.’ It was that girl, holding her own luggage. ‘Please! Please let me go with you. I can do anything you want and take care of you during the journey,’ the girl begged. I knew Zang would refuse.

Zang felt a bit embarrassed and said, ‘I am sorry, madam, but it’s not good for a girl to travel with two men.’

I thought to myself ‘Yes, so just go back little girl, and never appear in front of Zang anymore. Even if you travel with us, he would never accept your love.’

‘I don’t care. I have considered that already. I...’ the girl hesitated, ‘I like you!’

Zang was so astonished that he couldn’t say a word. The only thing he did was bow and apologize.

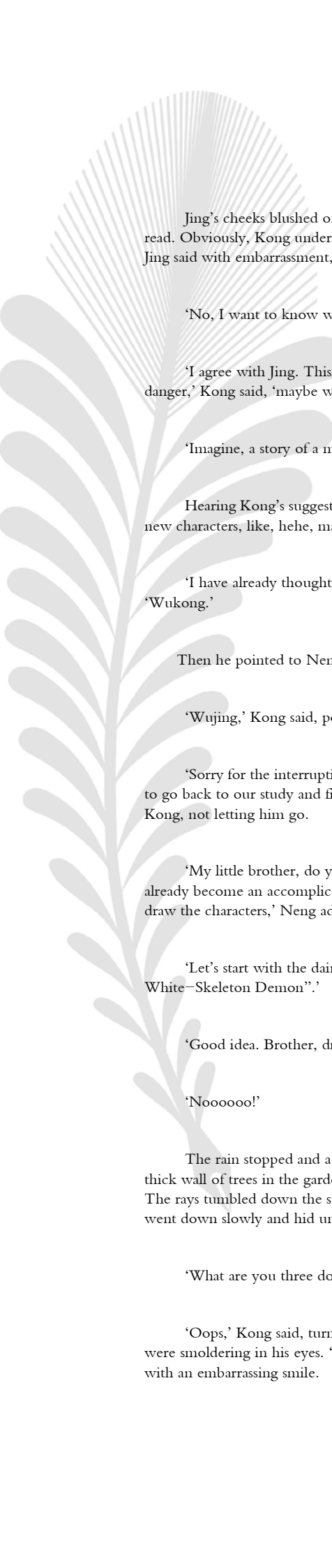
‘But master!’

‘I am sorry, lady. Don’t you understand? Zang cannot accept your love.’

That was the breaking point of my patience. Anger boiled deep in my heart, as hot as lava. Although Zang had rejected her, the love and passion stored in her eyes rendered my inexplicable resentment and fury. If I could, I would conceal Zang, and not let anyone know of his existence. The pressure of the raging sea of anger forced me to do something crazy.

‘Zang cannot accept your love,’ I repeated my words, pulling Zang to my side and said, ‘he is mine.’ Not giving the girl or Zang the chance to say a word, I covered Zang’s mouth with...

‘Hey! Don’t close the book, brother!’ Neng yelled.



Jing's cheeks blushed of hot crimson and he couldn't stop thinking about the scene he had just read. Obviously, Kong understood the scene that Jing had just read and he stared at Jing with a smile. Jing said with embarrassment, 'I think the diary is quite boring. Maybe we can read other books.'

'No, I want to know what will happen to that beautiful girl,' Neng said, trying to grab the diary.

'I agree with Jing. This diary is boring. I was expecting an exciting journey, full of plight and danger,' Kong said, 'maybe we can rewrite the diary into an interesting story.'

'Imagine, a story of a monk going to the West, going through many dangers.'

Hearing Kong's suggestion, Neng couldn't wait to do so and suggested, 'Maybe we can add some new characters, like, hehe, many pretty girls.'

'I have already thought of three new characters,' Kong said proudly and pointed to himself, 'Wukong.'

Then he pointed to Neng, 'Wuneng.'

'Wujing,' Kong said, pointing to Jing. 'That's the name of the new characters.'

'Sorry for the interruption,' Jing said, frowning. 'I'm not joining you guys. I think it's time for us to go back to our study and finish our homework.' Then he walked to the door but was pulled by Kong, not letting him go.

'My little brother, do you think you can run away? Since you agreed to come with us, you have already become an accomplice,' Kong giggled and said. 'You are good at drawing right? Just help us to draw the characters,' Neng added.

'Let's start with the diary we have just read. Just rewrite it as a story called "Monkey Subdues White-Skeleton Demon".'


'Good idea. Brother, draw the characters.'

'Noooooo!'

The rain stopped and a rainbow climbed up to the blue sky. Streams of sunlight fell through the thick wall of trees in the garden, filling up every space between the leaves with warm, and sugary light. The rays tumbled down the strands of grass, which gleamed with the remaining raindrops. The sun went down slowly and hid under the horizon. The sky was dyed in scarlet red. The night was coming.

'What are you three doing here, hm?' It was a sound full of anger.

'Oops,' Kong said, turning around. Their father was standing outside the room. Fires of fury were smoldering in his eyes. 'Haha. Dad, we are just trying to clean up your room,' Kong answered with an embarrassing smile.



'Nonsense! Get out and do your homework. Now!' Their father roared.

'Yes, father,' the triplets lowered their heads and exited the room with disappointment. The room was a mess and full of papers on the ground. Father picked them up and had a look. There were some pictures, drawings of a monkey standing on a cloud. It was Jing's drawing. There was also a novel, with 98 chapters, written on the paper. It was Kong's writing. On the first page, there were four words
--- Journey to the West.

Pink

Canadian International School, Metha, Mana – 16

2 hours before.

The mirror is fogged up. Particles of water start to roll down the glass as she turns the faucet another forty degrees to the left, wanting the water to burn her, forcing her to feel something. The curtain screeches as she pull it across the rusted rail, exiting the soap lathered shower onto the fluffy pink carpet conforming to the soles of her feet.

She feels.

Her reflection looks back at her as she opens the third tub of *naariyal saphed kreem*, pushing it into her skin, wanting the pores to open and consume the chemicals that would make her like them. This was the only thing her *maan* had sent with her when she ventured the seas on the splinter ridden boat, making sure her daughter had the tools with her.

“Hello, my name Anjali,” she would say. *No*, Anja from now on. She tried again.

“Hello, my name Anja.”

“I am happy to be here,” she would add.

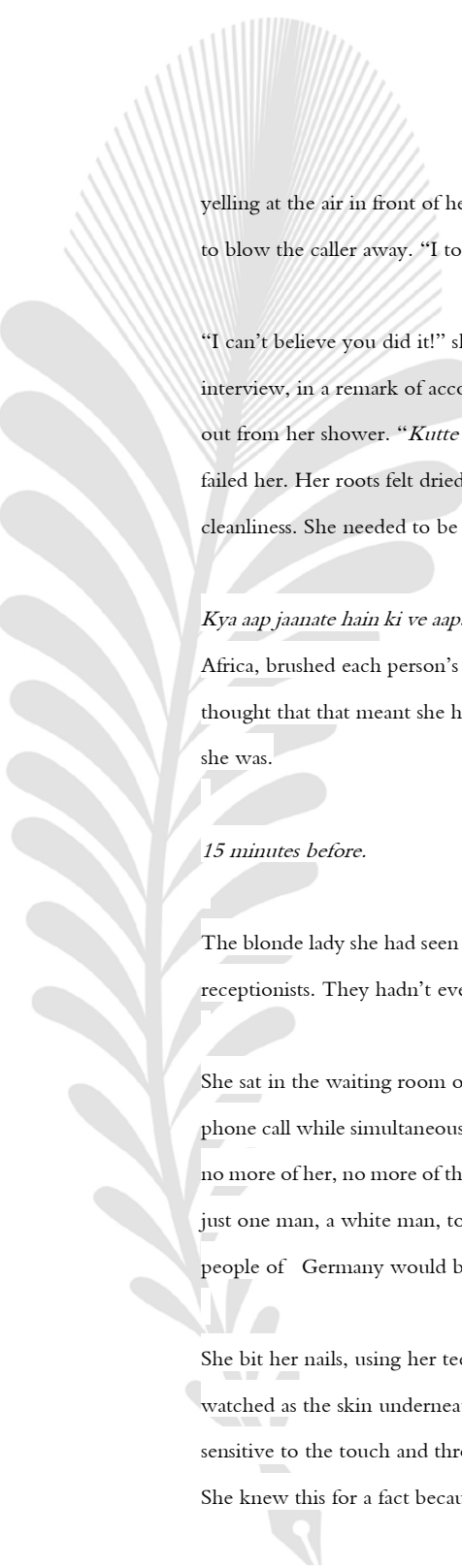
“Germany is good country,” she would enunciate, not missing a syllable, conjunction, or adjective that would make her seem illegitimate. Braids coiled down her scalp, the only light part of her body stood out like tracks against her no-milk chai infused skin. “I need to stop drinking that,” she whispered.

She pulled the trousers that fit too tight around the hips, and hung too loose around the waist, up her unshaven legs, stubble and all, clasping the metal hook tightly on the second rung. She took the second-hand yellow, sunflower encrusted tank top, pulling it over her neck, unconsciously fiddly with the low neckline. She resisted the urge to throw her *lal dupatta* over it, to cover her modesty.

30 minutes before.

She took each step towards the mirror towering building with anticipation yet hesitated as she saw what she had seen this morning in the windows of the building. Her daily ritual had not changed.

A woman intercepted her, causing her to stop in her path, as she watched her suited silhouette float by with the fairy clicks of her 4-inch burgundy heels. She pulled out her state of the century cell phone, before



yelling at the air in front of her, making sure the punctures at the bottom of the screen caught enough air to blow the caller away. “I told you not to do that! I can’t believe you did it!”

“I can’t believe you did it!” she whispered back at her reflection. Only she would say this after her interview, in a remark of accomplishment. She smiled, noticing how her hair had frizzed since coming out from her shower. “*Kutte ke tatte!*” Everything else seemed presentable, but her unreliable hair had failed her. Her roots felt dried of their usual *thel*, as if washed out of her. She was dry. Flaky. Heavy with cleanliness. She needed to be straight, that was the right look.

Kya aap jaanate hain ki ve aapake baal pareekshan karane ke lie brash karate the? They really had, at least in Africa, brushed each person’s hair to see if it was like white people hair. For the longest time she had thought that that meant she had to make her hair white, so as a child she put *dhai* in her hair. How naïve she was.

15 minutes before.

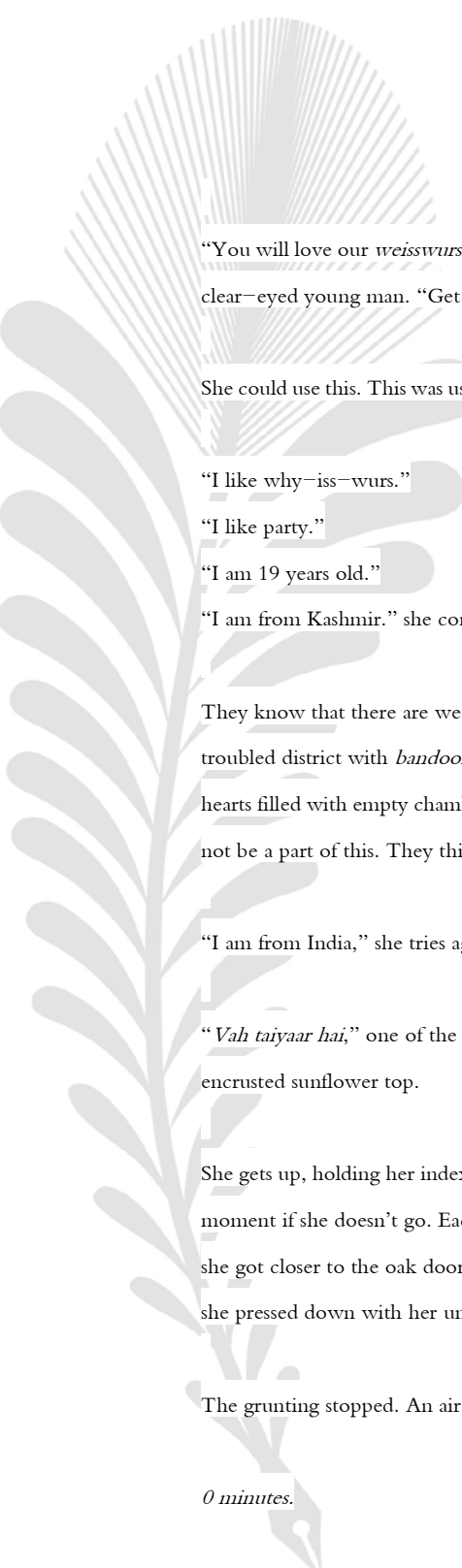
The blonde lady she had seen had already walked into the oak doors that was guarded by two stone-faced receptionists. They hadn’t even spared her glance.

She sat in the waiting room of the carpeted 23rd floor, watching the receptionist answer phone call after phone call while simultaneously *pitter-pattering* on her computer. Beyond the large oak doors there were no more of her, no more of the familiar chai colour that ran this way in that in grey pinned suits. There was just one man, a white man, to be examining her, making sure she was ok. *Revision:* making sure that the people of Germany would be ok.

She bit her nails, using her teeth to peel off the notches that hung loose, dry with drained moisture. She watched as the skin underneath showed raw pink flesh, there was no chai anymore. The pink flesh was sensitive to the touch and throbbed in a rhythm of humanness. It throbbed with the blood of the living. She knew this for a fact because if she were the unliving she would feel no pain, but, she feels.

5 minutes before.

She glanced at the multi-coloured, glossy pamphlets adorning each side table around the room. Blonde, blonde, brunette, blonde, black. White seemed to be their favourite colour. They all looked so happy, with their perfectly non-patchy bleached teeth sparkling with euphoria. Children were there too. *Ah.* So it wasn’t just the big ones. They were also white though.



“You will love our *weisswurst!*” Why hadn’t she gotten this before? She saw another quote, this time by a clear-eyed young man. “Get ready for *oktoberfest!*”

She could use this. This was useful. He would like it, he would think she was good, good enough to know.

“I like why-iss-wurs.”

“I like party.”

“I am 19 years old.”

“I am from Kashmir.” she continues. *No*, they know this is dangerous.

They know that there are weekly raids and she is terrified and desperate to leave. They know that it is a troubled district with *bandookadhaariyon* everywhere. They carry the guns of their fallen brothers, and hearts filled with empty chambers, for they are not part of the living. *No*, she could not say this, she could not be a part of this. They think they know that she could be one of them.

“I am from India,” she tries again. Done.

“*Vah taiyaar hai,*” one of the suits says, looking up to meet her eyes before letting them drop to her encrusted sunflower top.

She gets up, holding her index finger to the raw flesh unpeeled, holding in the blood that could fall at any moment if she doesn’t go. Each step feels like running on sand, her muscles seemed to contract each step she got closer to the oak doors. The silver of the knob was cold to her touch, and grunted a low grunt as she pressed down with her unpeeled hand.

The grunting stopped. An air locked click and hours later, she was still pink, but so was he.

0 minutes.

A Bleak Hong Kong

Hong Kong Academy, Raymond, Sierra – 17

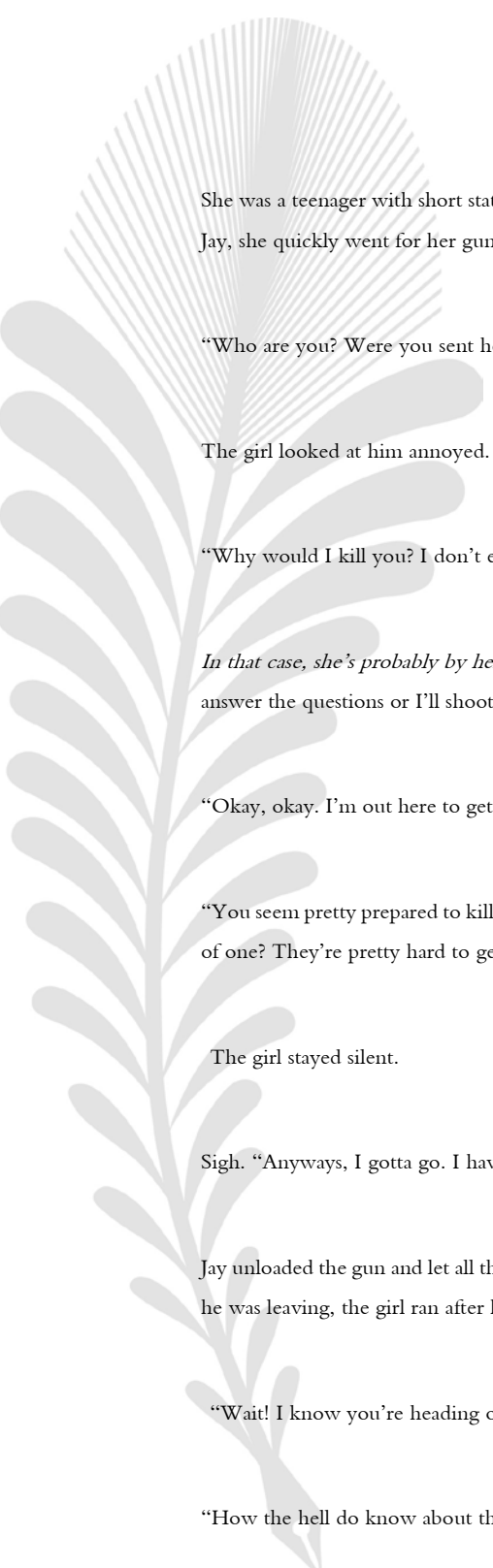
It was dusk and Jay Chen hurried across the barren suburbs. He dashed past an old rusty sign that said “Tsim sha Tsui MTR.” There were many run down stores filled with trash and empty boxes. He had to get away. He knows what they’ll do to him if he’s caught. He had stolen information from the government on the nearest safe haven. As soon as he was in the clear, he would gather some supplies and head out west to find this safe haven.

He ran all the way to Central. Without stopping. He had been in one too many situations where he pissed off the wrong people and so had practiced well in the art of running away. Central, also known as SOHO, used to be where a lot of rich people hung around until global warming forced the government to evacuate half the population from Hong Kong. Jay and his family were among the many that were unfortunately forced to stay because only those rich enough could pay for the evacuation transport. Gas prices had skyrocketed due to the UN’s unanimous vote to cease all oil production to slow down global warming. But, their vote was too late. The amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere drastically changed the Earth’s weather patterns. Hong Kong, a place that was mostly humid and hot, transformed to having seasonal weather like North America. The fall and winters were harsh, while the day time heat was a scorching blaze. Once the sun descended, the high temperature dove as well, making the night very cold. Besides the fluctuating weather conditions, Hong Kong was a dangerous place due to the crazy desperate and scared people that inhabited the city.

As Jay cautiously walked around, he found a grocery store that was mostly ransacked. It was dirty and there were broken flickering LED lights laying on the linoleum floor along with old candy wrappers. He went to the back of the grocery store and found the storage room. It was locked. But not for long as Jay was carrying a lock pick with him in his backpack. He fiddled with the lock until he heard the satisfying *click*. He opened the door and there were some boxes emptied, but it didn’t matter, there was enough food for him to pack for his journey. The storage room was quite spacious, filled with many boxes containing foods from various places.

“I’m surprised this hasn’t been ransacked already. I’ll have all the food I need to make it to the safe haven across the west from here.”

While he was digging around, he heard something. *KSHHH!* A box fell down at the back of the room. *What was that? Is someone there? I should probably check it out.* Jay quietly snuck towards the source of the sound and found a young girl lying on her back with a big box of noodles besides her.



She was a teenager with short stature. She had a worn out backpack and gun on her. As soon as she saw Jay, she quickly went for her gun. He snatched it out of her hands and pointed it at her.

“Who are you? Were you sent here to kill me?”

The girl looked at him annoyed.

“Why would I kill you? I don’t even know you.”

In that case, she’s probably by herself, scavenging whatever she can get her hands on. “Look kid. Just answer the questions or I’ll shoot you.”

“Okay, okay. I’m out here to get some food for myself, not to kill you. Besides, why would I need to?”

“You seem pretty prepared to kill someone when you have a gun. Anyways, how did you even get ahold of one? They’re pretty hard to get here.”

The girl stayed silent.

Sigh. “Anyways, I gotta go. I have more important things to do.”

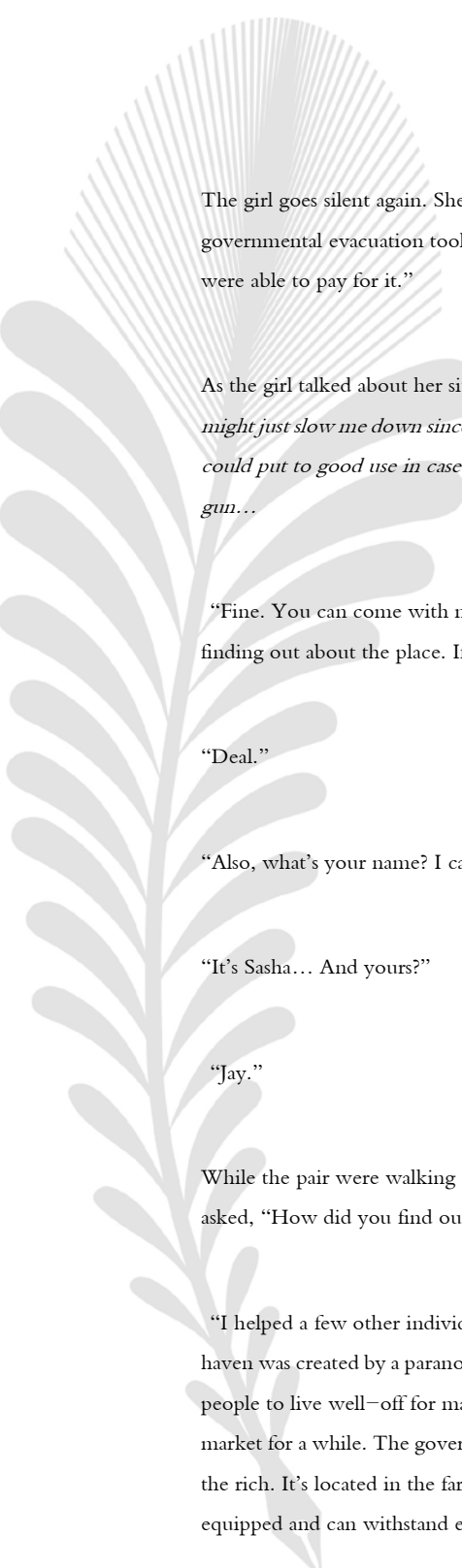
Jay unloaded the gun and let all the bullets scatter onto the floor. He turns to pick up his backpack and as he was leaving, the girl ran after him while hastily reloading her gun

“Wait! I know you’re heading out to some safe haven in the west. Take me with you!”

“How the hell do you know about this safe haven? Did you hear me talking to myself or something?”

The girl looked sheepishly at Jay. “Um... yeah I did. There’s been rumours about it ever since the evacuation happened.”

“Anyways, why do you even want to come with me? Don’t you have family here in Hong Kong?”



The girl goes silent again. She looks away and folds her arms. “I got seperated from my family as the governmental evacuation took place. My family were able to evacuate out of Hong Kong because we were able to pay for it.”

As the girl talked about her situation, Jay looked at her with suspicion. *Should I take her with me? She might just slow me down since she probably never worked a day in her life... but she has a gun which she could put to good use in case we run into trouble... And she didn't shoot me after she re-loaded her gun...*

“Fine. You can come with me kid, but don't slow me down because the government is on my ass for finding out about the place. If you can keep up, then I'll be okay with you tagging along. Deal?”

“Deal.”

“Also, what's your name? I can't keep calling you kid forever.”

“It's Sasha... And yours?”


“Jay.”

While the pair were walking across an MTR sign that read Sheung Wan, Sasha looked up to Jay and asked, “How did you find out about this safe haven exactly?”

“I helped a few other individuals to hack into a government computer. We found out that this safe haven was created by a paranoid billionaire who created a huge bunker that would allow a large group of people to live well-off for many years. He died a year before the evacuation occurred, it was on the market for a while. The government planned on buying it, but then they had to prioritize on evacuating the rich. It's located in the far west from here in China and borders Vietnam. The safe haven is well equipped and can withstand extreme weather. Once I get there, I'm going to stay there.”

“Forever?”

“ Hopefully.”



“Attention! To everyone who is listening, your government has decided to be generous and reward you for your hardships. However, not everyone will be rewarded because there is a catch. We want you to hunt down a man named Jay Chen. He has committed a heinous crime against us. If you capture him alive, we will evacuate you to a better area that is sheltered from the fluctuating weather patterns..”

The government thought of a way to capturing Jay alive. They used the system of speakers that they set up all around Hong Kong after the evacuation to show that the government still held control over the remaining citizens in Hong Kong. It showed that China took over Hong Kong to the remaining citizens.

1 week later...

“Ugh! Don’t you have anything else besides instant ramen? I’ve been eating ramen for a week now! You did pack some food other than ramen, right?”

“Sorry Sasha, but the nearest abandoned grocery store only had instant ramen.”

Sasha sighed and rolled her eyes. “...How far are we from the safe haven?”

“About a couple more days and we should be there.”

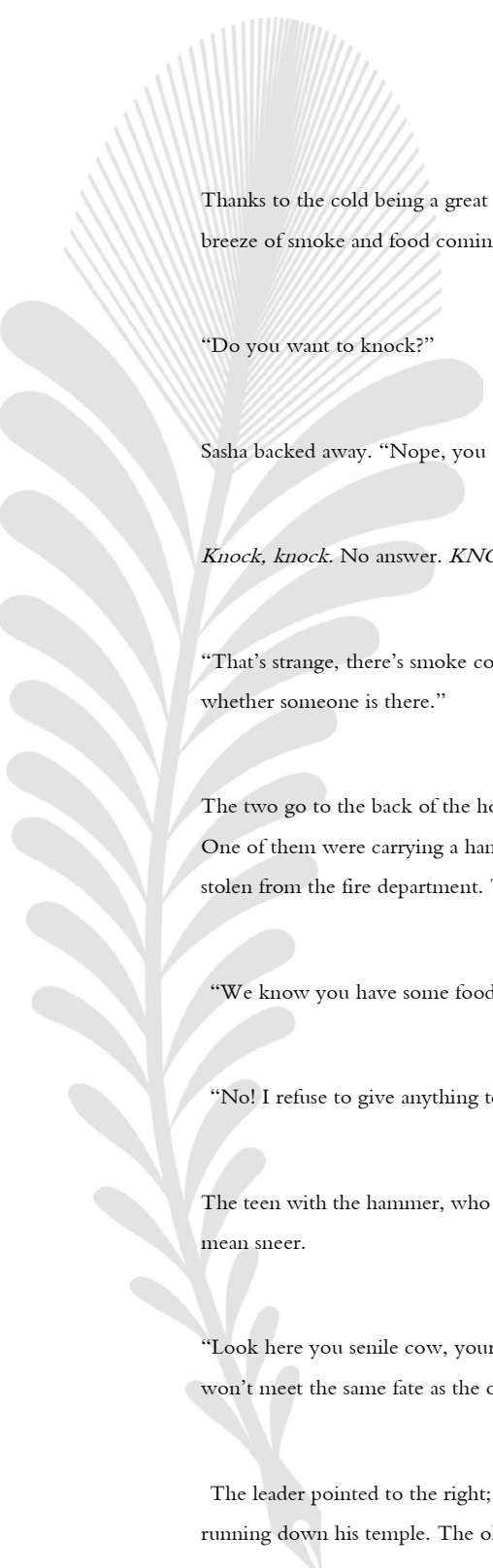
After Jay and Sasha finished their instant ramen, they packed their things up and headed out. Throughout the day, the sun shined intensely. When it was dusk, the sun descended and the temperatures plummeted along with it. Sasha and Jay knew from experience that the days would continue to get colder and colder. They had to find shelter due to the lack of warm clothes they had.

A few days after, Sasha spotted a simple concrete house in the distance. It was a kilometer away from an abandoned town. She points to it.

“Hey Jay, there’s a house in the distance. It doesn’t look too far, we should go over there and sleep for the night since the weather has been getting colder.”

“There is a high chance of people living there Sasha, I don’t know if I want to risk it.”

A chilly breeze swept through the area and became increasingly windy. “On second thought, let's go!”



Thanks to the cold being a great motivator, Sasha and Jay reached the house in little time. There was a breeze of smoke and food coming from the house. They went up to the door.

“Do you want to knock?”

Sasha backed away. “Nope, you can go ahead.”

Knock, knock. No answer. *KNOCK! KNOCK!*

“That’s strange, there’s smoke coming from the house yet no answers. Lets go to the back and check whether someone is there.”

The two go to the back of the house and find an elderly couple being harassed by several young men. One of them were carrying a hammer, another had a wrench. The third one carried an axe that looked stolen from the fire department. The one with the hammer pointed it to the old lady.

“We know you have some food you old cow! Hand it over or we’ll have to use force!”

“No! I refuse to give anything to you punks!” The old lady spat out. “Go get your own food!”

The teen with the hammer, who Jay presumed to be the leader, stepped closer to the old woman with a mean sneer.

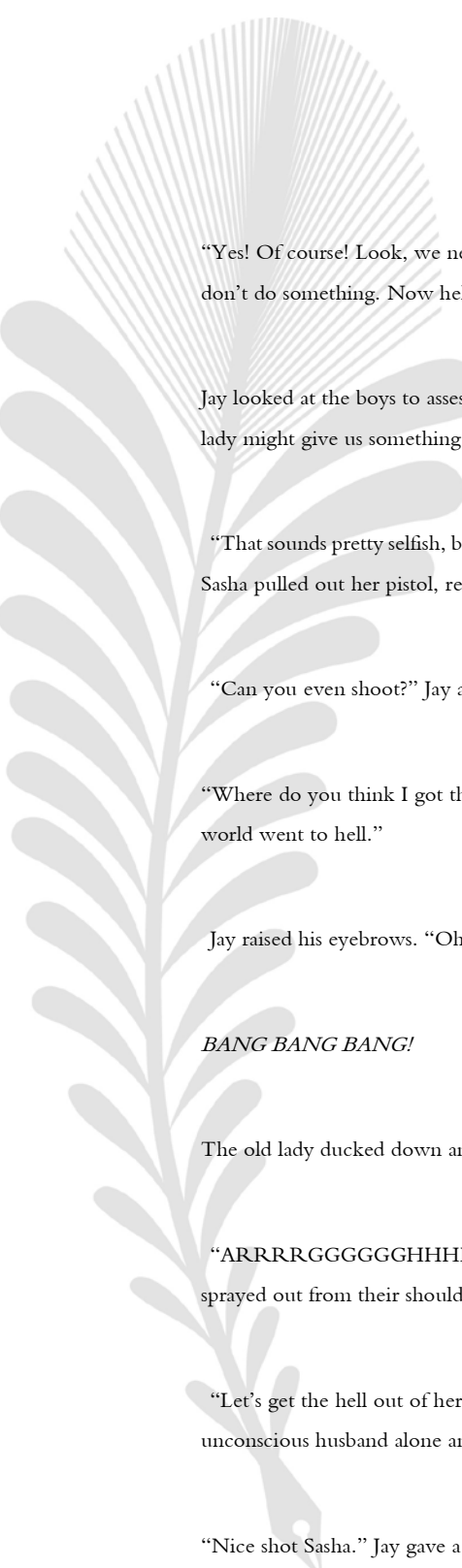
“Look here you senile cow, your attitude is only going to get you nowhere. Give us the food and you won’t meet the same fate as the old man over there did.”

The leader pointed to the right; an old man laid unconscious in the dirt with small ribbons of blood running down his temple. The old woman stayed silent for a moment.

Jay and Sasha were tucked behind a tree as they saw the fight escalate.

“This isn’t good...” Sasha whispered so the boys across them wouldn’t hear her.

“You can understand them?” Jay raised an eyebrow.



“Yes! Of course! Look, we need to do something. Those boys are going to kill those old people if we don’t do something. Now help me out!”

Jay looked at the boys to assess the situation. “We’re gonna have to fight those boys. If we do, that old lady might give us something in return for helping her.”

“That sounds pretty selfish, but I’m not arguing since we need a place to stay. So... I should shoot them?” Sasha pulled out her pistol, ready to shoot.

“Can you even shoot?” Jay asked in doubt.

“Where do you think I got this gun from? I took it from a shooting club that I belonged to before the world went to hell.”

Jay raised his eyebrows. “Oh, okay then, shoot them in the shoulder so they can’t move their arm,”

BANG BANG BANG!

The old lady ducked down and put her hands over her head, trembling at the sound of gunfire.

“ARRRRGGGGGHHHHHHH!!!!” The group of boys fell down and screamed in agony as blood sprayed out from their shoulder.

“Let’s get the hell out of here!!!” The leader cried out. The harassers left the old lady and her unconscious husband alone and retreated to the abandoned town.

“Nice shot Sasha.” Jay gave a thumbs up. No reply. He turned his head to Sasha.

She was a statue, pointing the gun out and shaking. “That... That was the first time I’ve ever had to shoot someone.” she averted her eyes from Jay’s gaze.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have told you to shoot them.”

Sasha put away her gun and went to help the old lady and her husband.

“Thank you dear.” The old woman said as she was assisted off the ground by Sasha.

Comment [1]: Ask a Chinese person (teacher) what the old lady would likely say to this. Think about using Mandarin script...

The old man was delirious as Jay supported him into the house and helped clean up blood from his head. After Jay was done, the old lady came up to Sasha and Jay.

“Thank you two for taking care of those delinquents. I can’t repay you in any other way except for cooking you a meal.”

Jay turned to Sasha. “Is she thanking us?”

“Yes, she wants to cook us a meal to show her gratitude.” Sasha went back to listening to what the old woman had to say.

“You two should also stay the night since it’s going to be a cold outside.” The old lady offered.

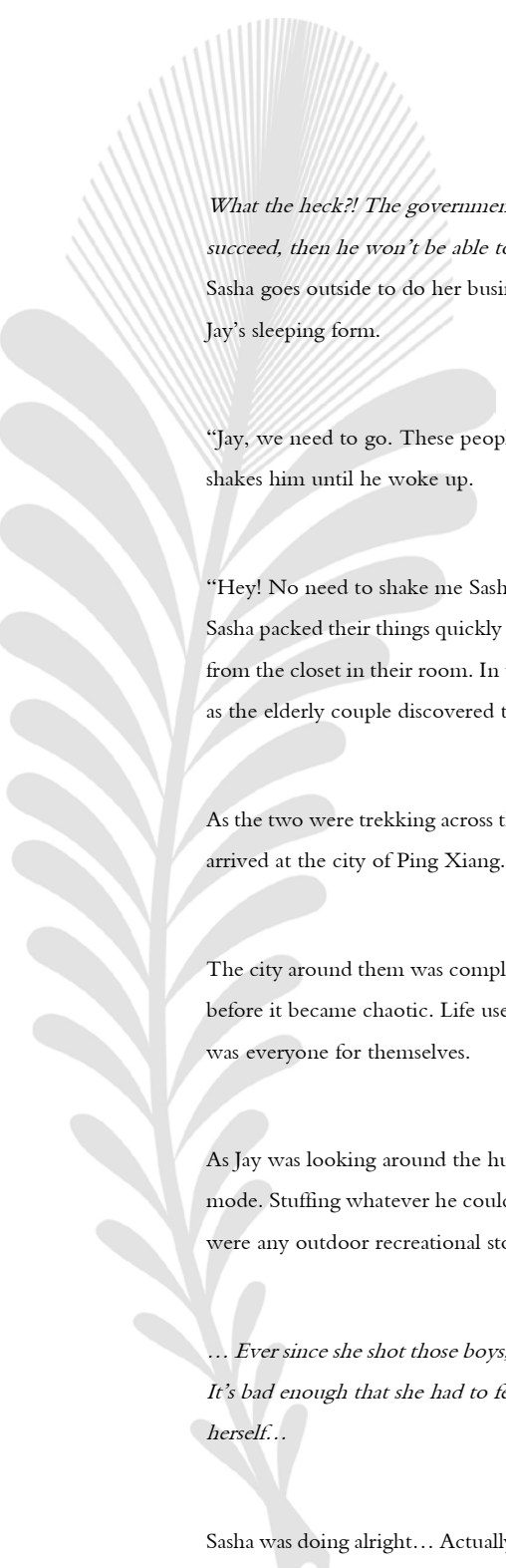
At dinner time, the old lady served Jay and Sasha delicious hot spicy noodles. After eating instant noodles for a week, Jay and Sasha thought these noodles were the best thing they had even eaten.

The old woman’s husband didn’t join them as he was recovering from his injury. After dinner, the old lady showed Jay and Sasha their room. There wasn’t much except for a mattress and some blankets as well as a closet. As the two were getting to sleep, Sasha went to the bathroom.

The bathroom was outside, but to get there, one would need to go through the living room, which was adjacent to the kitchen. As Sasha passed the kitchen, she heard the married couple conversing. She stopped and went as close as she could to hear the couple talking.

“Li, I’ve contacted the government. We need to find a way to hold them here until the government arrives! This could be our chance to get out of here! Besides, you’ve been hurt and we don’t have any medical equipment for that gash on your head.”

“Good idea, Mei. Just our luck for Jay Chen to be staying here!”



What the heck?! The government is encouraging these people to capture Jay just to evacuate! If they succeed, then he won't be able to take me to the safe haven! I can't let these old people get in the way!

Sasha goes outside to do her business and quickly comes back to her and Jay's room. She comes over to Jay's sleeping form.

"Jay, we need to go. These people want to hand you over to the government for their reward!" She shakes him until he woke up.

"Hey! No need to shake me Sasha! I heard you loud and clear." Jay said as he squinted his eyes. Jay and Sasha packed their things quickly and quietly. They snuck out of the house, taking some coats with them from the closet in their room. In the distance, Sasha and Jay could hear shouting coming from the house as the elderly couple discovered the empty room.

As the two were trekking across the land, the sun rose up, basking Jay and Sasha in rays of warmth. They arrived at the city of Ping Xiang. It would take them 8 hours to get to the border on foot.

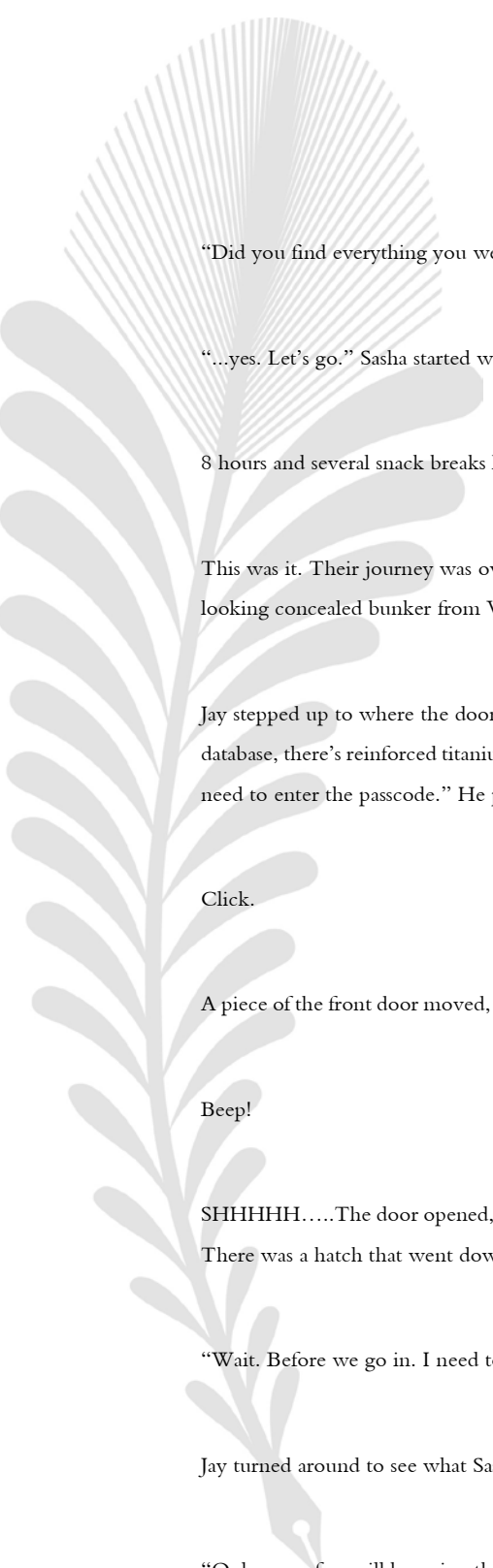
The city around them was completely abandoned. It was a constant reminder to Jay of what life was like before it became chaotic. Life used to be orderly; there were rules that everyone had to follow. Now, it was everyone for themselves.

As Jay was looking around the huge city, he found a grocery store and immediately went into hoarding mode. Stuffing whatever he could find into his bag. Sasha told Jay she was looking around to see if there were any outdoor recreational stores that had fire starters or knives.

... Ever since she shot those boys, she hasn't been usual herself... I shouldn't have asked her to do that... It's bad enough that she had to fend for herself at a time where she's supposed to be learning about herself...

Sasha was doing alright... Actually, really good. She managed to gain Jay's empathy without much effort. *I can't believe he fell for it! I just had to act traumatized and he believed me! Shooting those boys in the shoulders wasn't the first time I shot someone. That was merciful on my part. Once we get to the safe haven, I'm getting rid of Jay. I don't need a liability on my hands. Jay sounded like he wasn't interested in sharing it when we met, well neither did I.*

As Sasha was thinking of all of this, she found what she was looking for. Some firestarters and some nice sharp knives. She surprisingly found bullets for her gun as well. She stuffed her supplies into her backpack and walked back over to where Jay was.



“Did you find everything you were looking for?” Jay asked.

“...yes. Let’s go.” Sasha started walking off before Jay could say anything else.

8 hours and several snack breaks later...

This was it. Their journey was over. What stood in front of Jay and Sasha was a well-hidden simple looking concealed bunker from World War two . Underground was where all the good stuff was.

Jay stepped up to where the door was. “According to the information I got from the government’s database, there’s reinforced titanium behind this wooden door, making it really difficult to break into. I’ll need to enter the passcode.” He pulled out the door handle.

Click.

A piece of the front door moved, revealing a touch screen. Jay entered the passcode. 5..8...J...k...#...3...

Beep!

SHHHHH.....The door opened, revealing the insane network of pneumatics that kept the door locked. There was a hatch that went down to the bunker. Its design was based on a submarine’s hatch.


“Wait. Before we go in. I need to say something first.”

Jay turned around to see what Sasha needed to say.

“Only one of us will be going through that door.” Sasha gave him a stern look.

“What do you—” Before Jay could finish his question, Sasha whipped out her gun.

BLAM BLAM BLAM!!!



Jay hit the ground and couldn't move. He had several holes in his chest. The cavity in his lung was swelling with blood, leaking out and staining his jacket with messy scarlet patches.

Sasha towered over him to see if she got him good. She left him for dead, entering the bunker. Jay's vision was blurred, blotchy shadows covered his field of vision face. He heard Sasha close the door, locking him out. SHHHHHH.....

"Murghmm..." Jay grumbled in pain. He closed his eyes. Letting darkness engulf him.

Smiling in Deutschland

Korean International School, Bezanilla, Maria – 17

I moved up a branch. There were no more good cherries where I was standing. Helene was still below me, working on finding the last of the juicy ones. Half sitting on a relatively sturdy branch, I reached in front of me and pulled at a cluster of cherries, all of which seemed appealing and in accordance with Helene's description of "usable cherries", and bended over to place them in the basket.

"Aufsteigen," I looked down to see Helene struggling to move the basket to a higher branch. "A little help, bitte."

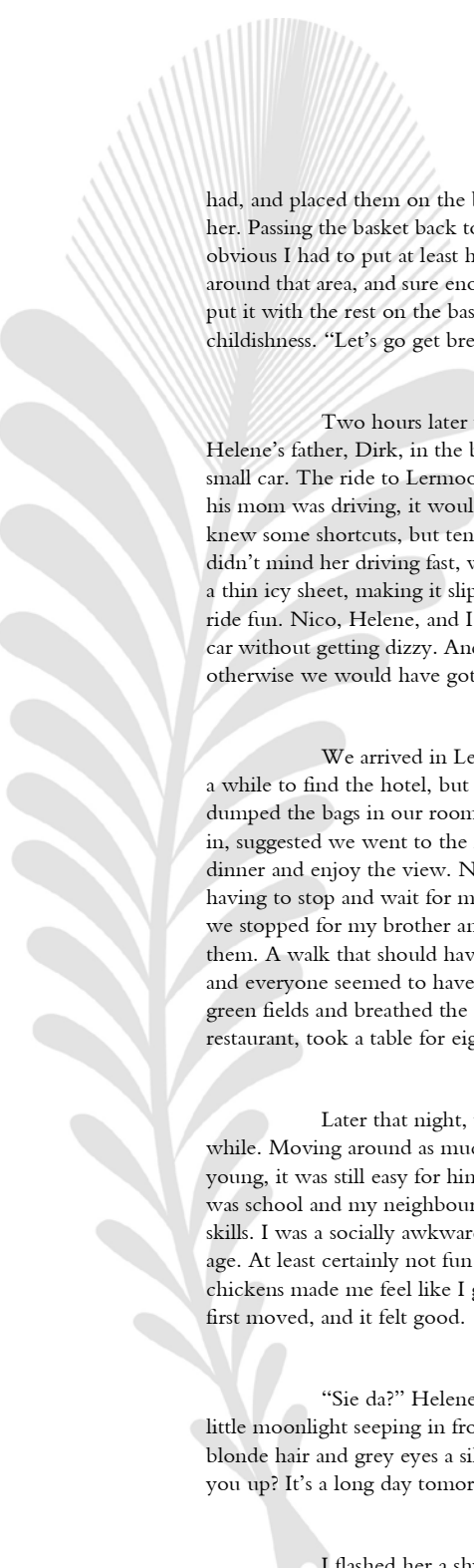
We carefully hoisted the basket in stages, as she climbed up behind it, supporting it from underneath. It was much too heavy now but Helene insisted that more was needed. In a comfortable silence, we worked our way around the top of the second tree, stripping it of the good cherries, and occasionally throwing the split or leaking ones at each other. We picked cherries for around five minutes more before Frau Friebe came to get us. "Please, I'll be making pies for a week if you pick any more Kirschen." She moved a little, trying to find a better place to see the basket from. "Yes yes, beenden, it's enough. Come down now."

Helene expertly climbed down before me so that I could pass the basket down to her. Having made sure that she had the basket secured in her arms, I moved down a couple of branches before jumping down to the ground. With both feet back on freshly cut grass and the basket overflowing with perfectly ripe cherries, I breathed in the crisp air of an early morning and immediately felt a smile making its way onto my face. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Helene steal a glance at me, and though she turned back quickly, I managed to catch the look of pride on her face. What can I say, the girl got a smile out of me, the first in weeks, she had every right to feel proud.

I helped Frau Friebe bring the basket inside and, with some strain, placed it on the kitchen countertop. Frau Friebe turned to me, "Danke," and smiled sweetly. I returned the smile, "Gern geschehen. It's no problem."

From outside Helene was calling my name, asking me to join her again. I walked out through the back kitchen door and turned a slight right in the direction of the garden. Frau Friebe's garden wasn't huge or extraordinary, but in the space she had, she had somehow managed to fit two chicken pens, two cherry trees, and several short crop rows on which she was growing potatoes, strawberries and carrots. The two cherry trees, small but sturdy, worked as a natural divider between the crops and the chicken pens, in order to protect the crops from getting picked at. When I got to the garden, Helene was grabbing something from the top of one of the pens while gesturing for me to get closer. On either side of the ramp, we readied ourselves to open the wooden gate of the pen; Helene with the small basket that she had grabbed, and me, as instructed by her, with ready hands to grab at the first chicken that ran out. "Ready?" she looked at me expectantly. I nodded, "Yes."

With a quick tug at a rope, the gate was opened and out flew my hands to catch the first chicken and take it by surprise, and Helene with great timing placed the basket underneath the hen I had, just as it cackled and released an egg on the basket. We burst into laughter as I let the hen go and five others followed after her, all coming out in a frantic manner to avoid getting caught. Helene looked at me, "Do you want to do this part?" I thought about it briefly. Her face clearly showed that she would enjoy watching me do this, whatever 'this' was. I figured that was a bad sign. I shook my head. "I've never had to do anything like this; from where I come, nobody has chickens." She smiled at that. I shrugged, "You show me and maybe I will do it after you." She seemed to agree with that. She handed the basket over to me, with the medium-sized egg rolling around in it, and stuck her hand inside the pen. Her face in that moment was a mixture between a grimace and concentration, but in seconds it became a look of satisfaction as she brought out three eggs, much the same size as the one we



had, and placed them on the basket. She grinned at me, “There’s one left. You can do it.” I owed it to her. Passing the basket back to her, I cautiously put in my hand, patting the floor of the pen until it was obvious I had to put at least half of my arm inside. I reached into the right corner and blindly felt around that area, and sure enough, I felt the smooth shape of the egg. I carefully took it in my hand and put it with the rest on the basket, a look of triumph on my face. Helene shook her head at my childishness. “Let’s go get breakfast.”

Two hours later we were all in two different cars; my mom, dad, and brother, along with Helene’s father, Dirk, in the big car, and me, Helene’s mom, Susanne, and her brother, Nico, in the small car. The ride to Lermoos was around 2.5 hours, or so Susanne had said. But according to Nico, if his mom was driving, it would only take about an hour. Originally, I thought this was because she knew some shortcuts, but ten minutes into the ride, I realised it was because of how fast she drove. I didn’t mind her driving fast, what scared me was that it was pouring rain and the roads were covered in a thin icy sheet, making it slippery enough to be potentially dangerous. Still, we managed to make the ride fun. Nico, Helene, and I had brought along candy and some card games that we could play in the car without getting dizzy. And thankfully, Susanne didn’t mind us playing loud music and singing along, otherwise we would have gotten very bored.

We arrived in Lermoos, hungry and sore, but excited for the day that followed. It took us a while to find the hotel, but as soon as we did, we unloaded the cars of our bags and checked in. We dumped the bags in our rooms and left to go find a place to eat. My dad, having spotted it on the way in, suggested we went to the Alpenrose Hotel, one of the bigger ones in the area, to have an early dinner and enjoy the view. Nobody opposed. We walked to the hotel at a tourist pace, occasionally having to stop and wait for my mom as she took pictures of everything she saw, and, more than once, we stopped for my brother and Nico to look in a store for candy or anything as equally intriguing to them. A walk that should have taken ten minutes, at a normal walking speed, took us forty minutes, and everyone seemed to have forgotten about their hunger and sore spots as we looked around the green fields and breathed the fresh air. Eventually we made it to the hotel, found our way into the restaurant, took a table for eight and enjoyed the pretzels they had on the table as starters.

Later that night, when lying in bed, I felt like I belonged in a place for the first time in a while. Moving around as much as my family did was not easy, especially at my age. My brother was young, it was still easy for him to make friends wherever he went. All I had to rely on for a social life was school and my neighbours, but even then, the last place we lived in had not taught me many social skills. I was a socially awkward teenager that did not know how to make conversation with people my age. At least certainly not fun talk. But today, picking cherries and climbing trees and playing with chickens made me feel like I gained back a little of my lost self, or the child I’d left behind when we first moved, and it felt good.

“Sie da?” Helene next to me whispered. I turned around so I could face her. With the little moonlight seeping in from our bedroom window it was hard to see her face, but it gave her blonde hair and grey eyes a silvery shine, something that was a rather enticing sight. “What’s keeping you up? It’s a long day tomorrow.”

I flashed her a shy smile. “Thank you for today,” a little grin broke out on her face. “I haven’t felt that way in ages.”

We turned so that we were both facing the ceiling. We stayed in silence like that for a while. We watched the shadows shift with the amount of moonlight that was reflected from the small pond right underneath our window. Her tired voice broke the silence softly, “It was my pleasure. Gute Nacht.”

I closed my eyes, “Gute Nacht.”

A Journey to the Unknown

Korean International School, Lo, Christopher – 17

My name is Cheung Guan and this is my Story on which I went more than 8000 km away from the only home I knew to the City of Rome, which fell after a thousand years. This is my account of how the city fell.

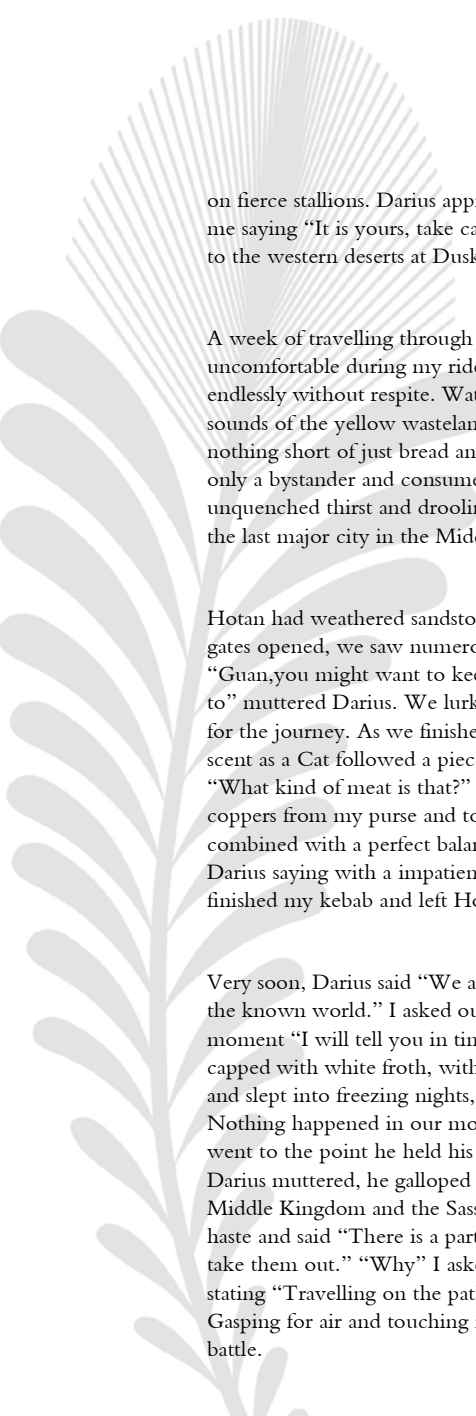
It was on the fields on Xi'an, that I tended to my rice crops in the afternoon spring. The Sun barraged my skin with its bright array. Cut, plow, rip, dig, those were several actions that were needed to maintain this little plot of land which provides me food and a home. For the last 2 years I have stayed on this farm and I just could not take it anymore. Without due hesitation, I put up my land for sale and sought a better, adventurous life. I gathered all the necessary belongings and left for the Huge City of Xi'an.

Days and nights went by as I trekked the path to Xi'an, dirt turned into stone and the people along the road became numerous. In the Midday, I trekked to see a monolith of such a city. The Gates of Xi'an, made with age old bronze, guarded by towers filled with archers. The City bustled with life with smoke edging across the horizon. Deep in the heart of the bustling sprawl, I knew that there were ways to the illustrious east. The streets were full of life, people going about their daily affairs, traders sought to hemorrhage as much coppers as they could. Bankrupting the naive traveller. I walked around this controlled chaos and very soon I heard the drunken cries from the Three Dragon Tavern. Mustering my feeble courage, I plunged into the fire.

The tavern was a hive of scum and villainy, filled with all kinds of shady characters all over the Middle Kingdom. Mercenaries from the northern steppes were confined to a corner, sharpening their blades. Smugglers played their board games, outwitting one another in the wooden establishment. There was however, one man that stood out from the crowd. He had a leather jacket, outfitted with a helmet from unknown origin. His sword was also from unknown make. Fuelled by my desire for adventure, I approached him carefully and asked him "Where do you get these antiques from?" Finishing his drink, the unknown man told me with just one word "Rome". Intrigued I asked again "What is Rome" The man became clearly incensed with my presence. "Ask me one more question and I'll make sure you will speak again". Shocked with the threat and his armed goons, I left immediately with a tail between my legs. I came out onto the streets again, blending in with the numerous faces. It appears I had to find another way to the West, I knew just the idea. The Markets facilitated trade between the unknown West with the Sassanids and beyond. Caravans would fulfill my thirst for adventure.

The markets were overflowing from goods all over China and the gateway to the west. Freshly weaved silk from the mulberry trees in Zhejiang, Finely decorated porcelain from the famous artisans of Jiangxi and exotic tea leaves from the fringes of the Kingdom in Manchuria. Traders endlessly haggled to get the best prices, which I only know too well as a farmer. I looked for stalls which dealt with exotic goods, I saw one dealing with a yellow metal, which was not gold. I asked "Is it from Rome?" He was stunned and he quickly rebounded with an answer, saying "Yes, how do you know?" filled with interest how I discovered this knowledge. I quickly replied "From a group of thugs in the Three Dragon Tavern". He frowned slightly with utmost scrutiny, stating that "That pitiful excuse for a Tavern, filled with dangerous men, evil men. Better be quiet about Rome, especially in China." "I want to travel to Rome." I said with a steadfast reply. "What skills do you have which would provide for my merry company?" "I have experience in haggling and experience in War." I said. "There Is a lot of people who have these qualities, you can travel with me but what do you offer for a place?" with a silver tongue. "20 Stones of Grain should be enough." The trader paused but for a moment and nodded. I am travelling to the East. "Oh, before I forget, my name is Darius."

I prepared myself for the journey with buying the essentials needed, a leather bottle of water, worn lamellar armour from my service and a brittle short sword and a month's worth of provisions for the journey. Very soon I was kitted out with the necessary items needed to trek out into the wilderness. Darius and his rugged company got ready for the journey, armed with various weapons and mounted



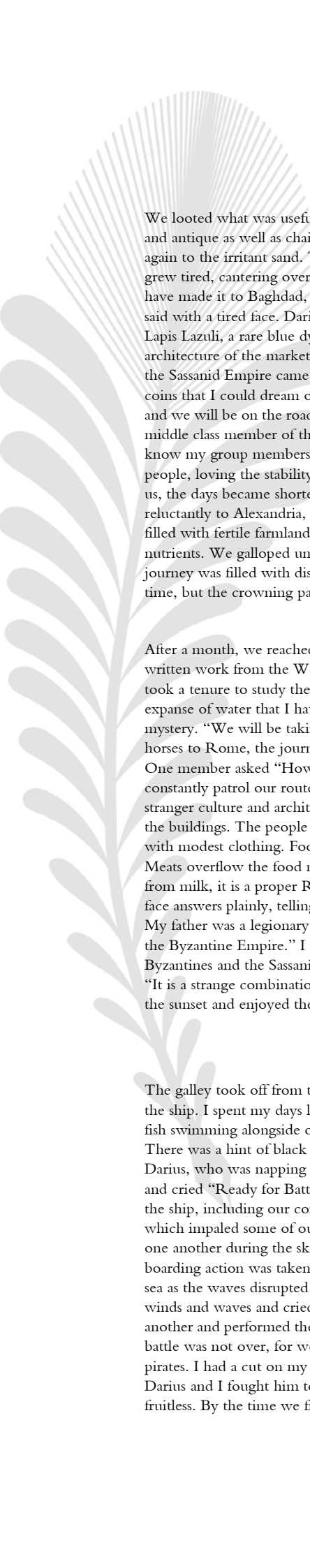
on fierce stallions. Darius approached me with a chestnut coloured horse and handed a set of reins to me saying "It is yours, take care of him for the rest of the journey." We set out from the gates of Xi'an to the western deserts at Dusk.

A week of travelling through the desert was the most gruelling, most dangerous and most uncomfortable during my rides through the Taklamakan desert. The sun bombarded us everyday endlessly without respite. Water became the most important good in this desert, sweeter than gold. The sounds of the yellow wasteland was nothing but the malcontent wind. The food on the march was nothing short of just bread and vegetables, laced with sand. The Desert offered nothing to its travellers, only a bystander and consumes those who fall. 6 Days and a majority of our water sucked out by our unquenched thirst and drooling with sweat, we arrived in area with arable land "We reached Hotan, the last major city in the Middle Kingdom."

Hotan had weathered sandstone walls which stood out from the orange desert. As soon as the wooden gates opened, we saw numerous caravans stopping to resupply and trading of goods from the far west. "Guan, you might want to keep your sword close, I do not want to stay in this place longer than I have to" muttered Darius. We lurked around the markets, refilling our water and gathering more provisions for the journey. As we finished up resupplying, I smelt something with a musty smell. I followed the scent as a Cat followed a piece of string and there was a grill, roasting meat. Lured by the smell, I asked "What kind of meat is that?" The old lady, busy fanning it says quickly "Lamb". I took out a few coppers from my purse and took a kebab. I bit into it awashed with multiple flavours, it was divine combined with a perfect balance of sweetness with salt and pepper. My moment was interrupted by Darius saying with a impatient voice "Are you done fantasising about being a gourmet?" I quickly finished my kebab and left Hotan as soon as we arrived and we finally left the Middle Kingdom.

Very soon, Darius said "We are entering the realm of the Sassanid Empire, one of the largest empires in the known world." I asked out of interest "Are you from the Sassanid Empire?" Darius paused but for a moment "I will tell you in time, now come." The mountains in the region were huge with the summit capped with white froth, with the mountain air soothing our nasal senses. The temperature grew colder and slept into freezing nights, covered with a mountain of wools and rags that the caravan offered. Nothing happened in our mountain route but suddenly, Darius seemed more on edge than usual. It went to the point he held his scimitar with his right hand constantly. "Wait here, I will check ahead." Darius muttered, he galloped off down the path and the company of 30 men waited, all drawn from the Middle Kingdom and the Sassanid Empire and beyond. 30 minutes went by and he came back in due haste and said "There is a party of marauding bandits in the region, numbering around 15, we must take them out." "Why" I asked? "They pose no threat." Darius quickly snapped a reply back at me stating "Travelling on the path for 15 years has made me experience rough things, terrible things." Gasping for air and touching my shoulder "Trust me on this". I smiled and the company readied for battle.


We followed Darius under the cover of darkness, we were in a loose formation and we spotted the bandits, sharpening their swords and eating their catch of the day. Darius ordered the men to stretch their bows. The wind howled and Darius shouted "Loose!". Arrows whistled in the air and hit their intended targets and Darius swirled his scimitar and shouted "Charge!" and men shouted in unison and the fight began. I engaged a medium sized man, equipped with a club with a black jerkin. I lunged my sword onto his arm and successfully parried. He then dealt a series of blows, trying to knock me off my feet and he did. I dodged his mighty blows and got it and threw dirt in his eyes and screamed in agony. Using this opportunity, I stabbed him through the stomach with my trustee sword and he became lifeless. My heart was still pounding and the day was won, just. 5 of our company was killed during the hectic chaos that ensued during battle and I sat down with Darius on a fallen branch saying "How far is the next stop?" Darius still cleaning his sword from the bloodstains told me "3 days ride, as the crow flies. Do you want to talk about it?". "I can never understand taking a life, missed opportunities, family and revoking the life to live." Darius replied with his old wisdom "The hardest part is sparing a life, not taking it, some people who live deserve to die, some people who have passed deserve to live. It is a hard question which haunts me still, lingering on my mind."



We looted what was useful and buried the dead. I found a new sword which could be a replacement and antique as well as chainmail armour. We then moved on to another City, being introduced once again to the irritant sand. The sand in my boots never seem to go away from the wasteland. My Horse grew tired, cantering over 5000 kilometers. On a quiet day, Darius stood in awe, he then said "We have made it to Baghdad, an important trade city on the Silk Road." "What goods do they trade?" I said with a tired face. Darius said "Trying to get a Business Acumen eh? Well they deal in Dates and Lapis Lazuli, a rare blue dye." Baghdad was a new city that I was captivated by, the people and the architecture of the market. Especially in the Merchant Quarter, with mosaics creating stories of how the Sassanid Empire came to be. Darius traded off Spices and Silk from China for thousands of gold coins that I could dream of not working ever again. "We are going to Rome next, rest up for 3 days and we will be on the road again" Darius said to the group. We stayed in nice accommodations, fit for a middle class member of the society. We rested, talked and feasted in the house we hired in and I got to know my group members. The people are very kind yet shy, staying away from unfamiliar ideas or people, loving the stability maintained after the countless wars waged in the region. Unfortunately for us, the days became shorter as we started enjoying ourselves. By the 3rd day, we left Baghdad reluctantly to Alexandria, a city near the ocean. We rode through the plains of Syria and south of it, filled with fertile farmland of swabs of wheat. Canals flowed with fresh water, enriching the land with nutrients. We galloped under the guise of the red sun, not burdened as hard as months before. The journey was filled with discovery, friendship and a bit of danger and hardship which I carved for all this time, but the crowning part was Rome, in which we take large boats to the City.

After a month, we reached Alexandria, a "scholarly capital" as Darius said. It had contained all the written work from the West, in a library, a great library in which Scholars all over the Roman Empire took a tenure to study the vast knowledge housed in such a city. I was left dazed by seeing a huge expanse of water that I have never seen before, It seemed to never end and the horizon was met with mystery. "We will be taking all of our goods and horses in this Galley to transport all of our goods and horses to Rome, the journey will take 3 weeks at most, if the wind is good 19 days. Any questions?" One member asked "How treacherous are the seas?" Darius replied with a frank statement, "Pirates constantly patrol our route so be vigilant of black sails, I'll give you 2 days to rest." The City had stranger culture and architecture, It was more refined, with marble and white stones making up most of the buildings. The people wore simple tunics compared to those in Baghdad which adorned themselves with modest clothing. Food in Alexandria was also vastly different, with a different types of bread. Meats overflow the food market, ranging from lamb, beef and pork. Combined with Cheese made from milk, it is a proper Roman Feast. I asked Darius "Where are you from?" Darius with an empty face answers plainly, telling me that "I am half Roman, half Sassanid. It is a strange combination I know. My father was a legionary and my mother was a tailor. They both met in Constantinople, the heart of the Byzantine Empire." I was taken aback slightly, as it was a strange combination. "Both the Byzantines and the Sassanid Empires were at war right as you told me?" I replied with inquisitiveness. "It is a strange combination but It helped me mould the person that I am today." We looked out into the sunset and enjoyed the midday breeze and the incoming tide smashing towards the docks.

The galley took off from the port and we set out to the North West. Our Navigator, Horacles sailed the ship. I spent my days looking out into the sea, smelling the fresh fragrance of the salty sea, seeing fish swimming alongside our wooden oars and the gusting winds, which dried eyes without mercy. There was a hint of black on the horizon, very soon I realized it was a pirate galley, I rushed to see Darius, who was napping at the time. As soon as I told the news, he shook with shock and adrenaline and cried "Ready for Battle!". My heart was pumping, I was not ready to die just yet. 100 crewmen of the ship, including our company readied themselves for battle. The pirates unleashed a volley of arrows which impaled some of our crew. Projectiles ranging from rocks, arrows and javelins were hurled at one another during the skirmish, but very soon, the oars broke as the pirate galley closed in and boarding action was taken. The fighting was not confined to martial ability, it was a battle against the sea as the waves disrupted any form of cohesive fighting. People were falling over from the strong winds and waves and cried as the amount of wounded piled up. Me and Darius fought alongside one another and performed the best swiftness and successfully dealt with each others opponents. However, the battle was not over, for we had to counterattack. We lunged towards the galley and fought several pirates. I had a cut on my legs and the Captain approached us, with a massive two handed hammer. Darius and I fought him together but his defence was impeccable. A minute of endless attacks proved fruitless. By the time we finished fighting the battle had been won but the Captain was not willing to



surrender. Darius was struck down by his hammer and as he moved in for the finishing blow, I stood in front of his swing and passed out.

Slowly, but surely I opened my secreted eyes to the world once again with Darius at my side, though I felt massive pain from my chest. I muttered “Darius, you alive and where are we?” Darius chuckled “Still alive and kicking and we are in Rome.” I slowly got up and limped towards the balcony, finally seeing Rome and its wonders. The Coliseum was a monolith and the various houses dominated the area. The midday chatting of the markets can be heard from miles away and there is a smell of both stone and sewage beneath the house. I have made the journey to the Far West and now I am truly satisfied.

Keep Moving (Or you'll get overwhelmed)

West Island School, Tan. Joelle – 17

“there is no such thing as the impossible; only things that people don't believe in.”

He remembers his home, the way it always smelled like a strange combination of clean laundry and whatever air freshener his mother used that week. He remembers his mother, small and wiry though she was, getting up at the crack of dawn to ensure they have hot food to bring to school and ironed clothes to wear. His mother was a miracle, one who single-handedly raised three children and somehow earned enough money to keep the household running. She was a riptide unto herself, and he always associates her with that Shakespearean quote: ‘she be little, but she be fierce’.

He remembers his sister's fierce protectiveness, a furnace to contrast their mother's riptide. His sister was a nerd, without a doubt, but she wasn't bullied in school like those nerds on TV. She was the kind of nerd to carry whole *series* of hard-covered books, and if anyone tried to give her grief over the way she was, she was the kind of person to fling them into the locker (because dang it, she carried whole series of *Harry Potter* or *Lord of the Rings*, and that wasn't even counting all her AP textbooks).

He remembers his older brother, who made him the better person he is today. His brother, who would go out and cause all sorts of problems and make his mother cry as she had to bail him out again and again, and who would also relentlessly mock and tease him. But he knows his brother never means it because late at night, in their shared bedroom, he would whisper to his younger brother ‘*don't be like me*’. And he is a better person because he now knows what not to do and how to shrug insults off and to stay calm even though all he wants to do is strangle them like his older brother sometimes does.

They make him a better person through their combined presence; his mother – an unstoppable bolt of lightning, his sister – the furnace which scorched anything in her way, and his brother – the hurricane who left only chaos in his wake. He is the tsunami, obliterating anything in his path, leaving behind chaos and despairing families, where he will not let himself be held back by mere ordinary precautions.

It is because of them that he makes it out of the school before its inevitable collapse, that he doesn't gag and sob over the corpses that he finds, that he straightens and keeps walking with nothing else but his backpack. It is their voices who encourage him as he makes his way across the now barren landscape, occasionally meeting someone rocking on the ground as they attempt to find comfort in the action.

He walks and ignores the tears that occasionally stream down his face, unable to differentiate between the tears and raindrops that fall from the sky. He ignores the small voice in his brain telling him that his umbrella doesn't have holes in it.

He has started out with over five hundred in his wallet, but now has three hundred because he has been raised right and he's been paying for the food he takes even though there is no one there to receive it.

Sometimes he wonders if they got out of that disaster. If his mother managed to claw her way out of the wreckage, if his sister had clambered her way into sunlight, if his brother had tumbled out of the ruins just in time. If they are doing what he's doing and heading for the place his mother always croons to them about, the place where she and her husband met and got married in a whirlwind romance that lasted longer than anyone had any right to guess. The address is written down on a scrap of paper that he carries around with him absolutely everywhere he goes, but most of it is gibberish or in symbols that he doesn't recognise, and the only word he *does* recognise is ‘west’.

So he walks and walks and walks to the only direction he knows of – the west.

“where the earth is round and passive, labyrinth is jagged edges and awake. it will bring you places that you’ve only heard about in your wildest dreams, to place where you’ll close your eyes and be scared to open them because you don’t know what’s better – knowing that it’s there or knowing that it’s fake.”

The single momentary disaster splits his world in half. Quite literally, unfortunately. Screams ring through the air, alarms somehow sound over the cacophony of terror, and buildings quietly disintegrate into rubble as Labyrinth redirects its energy into repairing the fissure that had opened up and split it in half.

Saesryc doesn’t know why this happened. Or how it happened, for that matter. Labyrinth is supposedly omnipotent – it has lasted through aeons of war and civil unrest, and nothing short of a *miracle* is able to wreak havoc like this. The last time this happened is a story in the textbooks, supposedly a ghost story used to scare anyone out of attempting to leave Labyrinth.

But Saesryc had never been one of those believers. He had watched as parents threaten their children with exile from Labyrinth, of puppeteers using magic to create contorted figures and expressions to mimic the myths of those who left, of spirit stories told around flickering purple orbs and warm mugs of tea. He had rolled his eyes at them, too busy imagining life outside of Labyrinth, outside of the erratic temperament of Labyrinth that he had long since gotten used to.

Children used to flock around him to hear his bravado tales of leaving Labyrinth, and nod excitedly as they chirped up with details of their own to add. They would happily absorb the stories and scoff at the sceptics, sticking by Saesryc until their guardians forcefully tugged them away and scolded them for disrespecting Labyrinth (Saesryc would make faces at the guardians’ backs while the children dissolved into giggles, and so what if he’s ten–seven–two, people always say he has the mind of a fourteen–nine–six anyway).

When the crack splits Labyrinth into chaos, Saesryc takes the opportunity to creep closer to the edge, to the dark nothingness that would appear at the start but dissolve into lush greenery at the end, if elderly Trinket is to be believed. Saesryc has been in Labyrinth a long time, but Trinket has supposedly been there from the start.

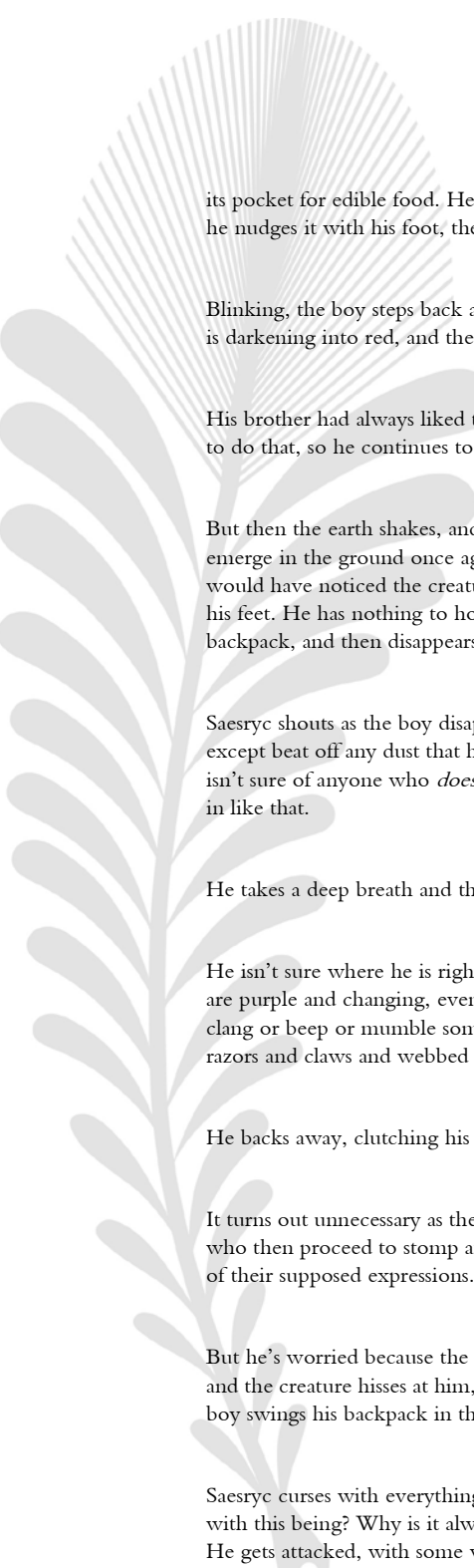
He wonders about the people there and the world and the magic and all that they have and don’t have as he finally leans too far forward to look and falls through–

People do not come shooting out of the ground screaming bloody murder. That is a fact that he’s had total faith in until someone *does* come shooting of the ground screaming bloody murder. The...man–pixie–fae–winged–creature–thing lands on its side, grumbling as it rubs one of its eyes and wrenches his teeth back into his mouth.

While the boy would very much have liked to turn and run, his legs are sore, he’s running out of food and money, and his mother has always raised him to be as polite as possible. So he carefully steps around the...thing and tries to continue on his way. But then the creature grabs his foot, so he channels his sister instead and slings his backpack off to whack the thing over the head with it.

The creature shrieks and lets out a series of clicks and clacks.

He watches it wearily before putting his backpack on and walking away. The creature lets out another series of sounds and then seemingly drops dead. The boy watches the creature in confusion, and the side of him that’s not his brother tells him to help the creature up instead of thinking about rummaging



its pocket for edible food. He gets his backpack ready, though, and avoids the creature's teeth. When he nudges it with his foot, the creature lets out another shriek and more clicks.

Blinking, the boy steps back and looks around. No one is in sight, nothing except for the grey sky that is darkening into red, and the land that is still filled with cracks.

His brother had always liked to annoy someone until they crack, and the boy knows he's not supposed to do that, so he continues to walk.

But then the earth shakes, and he ends up watching, almost absent-mindedly, as the cracks start to emerge in the ground once again. The creature is struggling to get up, and if he bothered to look, he would have noticed the creature has its eyes wide with alarm. The boy watches as the cracks spread to his feet. He has nothing to hold onto, so he accepts the inevitable, makes sure he has a grip on his backpack, and then disappears into the abyss.

Saesryc shouts as the boy disappears into what is hopefully Labyrinth. There is nothing he can do now, except beat off any dust that has tried to gather on him. He doesn't know all the rules of Labyrinth – he isn't sure of anyone who *does* – but he suspects that Labyrinth won't be happy with someone dropping in like that.

He takes a deep breath and then free-falls into the dark chasm as well.

He isn't sure where he is right now. There is something in the air that seems like grass, but the colours are purple and changing, even turning transparent. There are folks wandering around who squawk or clang or beep or mumble something he can't understand as they approach him with their hands and razors and claws and webbed fingers.

He backs away, clutching his backpack like a lifeline and ready to use it if necessary.

It turns out unnecessary as the creature lands in front of him. It clicks and hisses something at the beings, who then proceed to stomp away, disgruntled. At least, that's what he thinks. He doesn't recognise any of their supposed expressions.

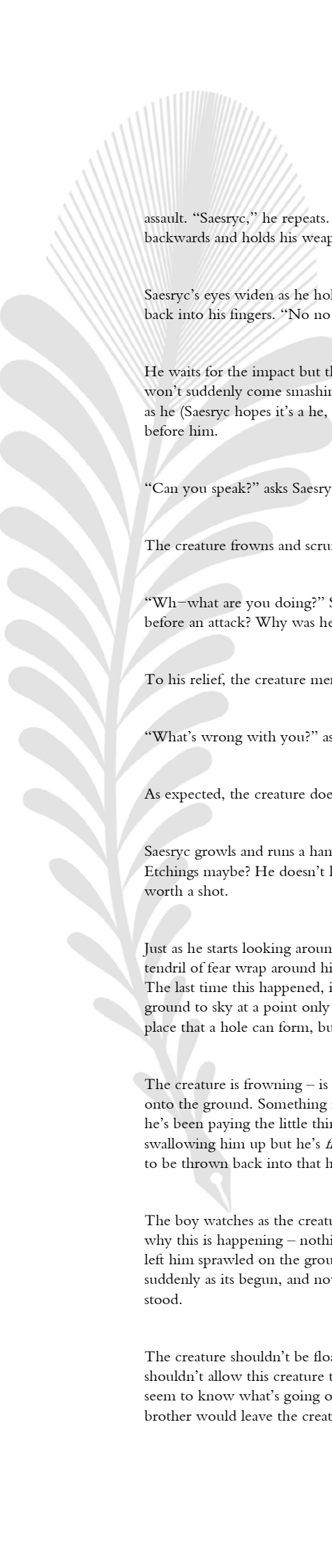
But he's worried because the creature is turning to him and his...face?...is set in a menacing expression and the creature hisses at him, almost like how he did earlier. And, since it worked so well last time, the boy swings his backpack in the creature's direction, downing him with a series of clicks.

Saesryc curses with everything he has as the crazy little being hits him with his weapon. What is wrong with this being? Why is it always hurting him? He just *saved* the stupid creature, and what is his reward? He gets attacked, with some weapon whose outer softer exterior contradicts the hardness it possesses.

He has to admit though, the being is surprisingly calm and predictable in its unpredictability. Much like a tsunami, really.

Saesryc swears angrily at the being, who is watching him now, and contemplates what to do next. The stupid little thing clearly doesn't understand his language, so he should find some other means of communication. Maybe he should see if this person can even speak.

"Hello." Saesryc tells the creature carefully. He waves a hand outwards. "My name is Saesryc." He jabs his fingers towards himself, and winces when one of them brush against a bruise left from the previous



assault. “Saesryc,” he repeats. “What’s your name?” He points at the pesky thing, but the thing zips backwards and holds his weapon above his head.

Saesryc’s eyes widen as he holds out his hands in what he hopes is a placating manner, drawing his nails back into his fingers. “No no no no no.”

He waits for the impact but there is none, so he cautiously opens his eyes and hopes that the weapon won’t suddenly come smashing to his face. The creature is standing before him, head tilted to one side as he (Saesryc hopes it’s a he, she’s are generally more vicious in his experience) contemplates the being before him.

“Can you speak?” asks Saesryc, exasperated.

The creature frowns and scrunches up its face.

“Wh—what are you doing?” Saesryc asks, feeling a little alarmed. Was this some form of preparation before an attack? Why was he doing this? What had *Saesryc* done?

To his relief, the creature merely lets out a tiny sound and then stops and holds his weapon tightly.

“What’s wrong with you?” asks Saesryc once more. This is getting repetitive.

As expected, the creature doesn’t answer.

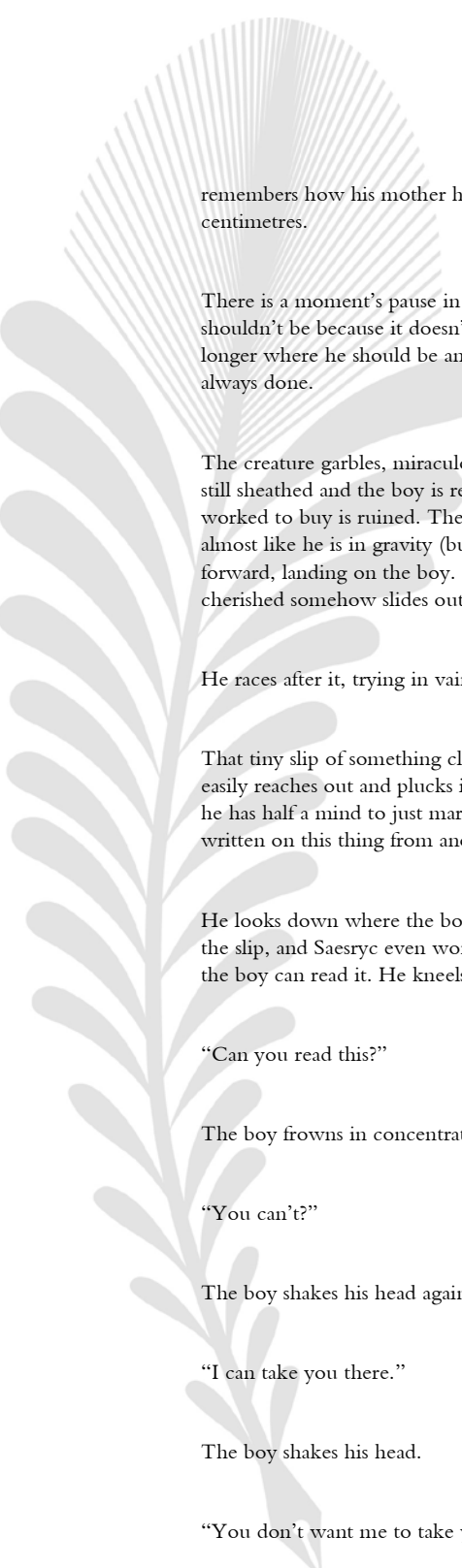
Saesryc growls and runs a hand over his face, trying to keep his cool. Right. Maybe more hand gestures? Etchings maybe? He doesn’t have any material to etch on – or etch *with*, for that matter – but it’s worth a shot.

Just as he starts looking around for something to draw with, the ground starts shaking. Saesryc feels a tendril of fear wrap around him as he recognises the rocking movement from the earlier catastrophe. The last time this happened, it had boded ill for Labyrinth, with the ground splitting in half from ground to sky at a point only Labyrinth knew about. He doesn’t think that they are anywhere near a place that a hole can form, but he had also thought that Labyrinth was invincible.

The creature is frowning – is it frowning? Saesryc *thinks* it’s frowning – and then it stomps its hind legs onto the ground. Something in his posture changes, and Saesryc doesn’t know what, but apparently he’s been paying the little thing too much attention because the next thing he knows, the ground is swallowing him up but he’s *floating* out of the ground and he should really be thankful he’s not going to be thrown back into that horrible world but he doesn’t know how to get down—

The boy watches as the creature desperately wriggles its limbs in an attempt to stay down. He wonders why this is happening – nothing about this is making sense. The rumbling he felt beneath his feet had left him sprawled on the ground as he attempts to regain his bearings. The shaking has stopped as suddenly as its begun, and now there’s a thin hairline crack spreading from where the creature once stood.

The creature shouldn’t be floating. It’s not right. Science or physical whatever people called it here shouldn’t allow this creature to float while he himself remains on the ground. The creature doesn’t seem to know what’s going on either, but it’s clearly panicking. The boy thinks of how his older brother would leave the creature struggling, and contemplates helping it back down. Then he



remembers how his mother had taught him to be kind, and he holds his bag up, giving him a few centimetres.

There is a moment's pause in the world, and the boy *feels* it, feels it like it's natural except that it shouldn't be because it doesn't make sense and science doesn't explain it, but he accepts that he's no longer where he should be and that he should adapt to this new environment, like his mother had always done.

The creature garbles, miraculously understanding his intentions, and grabs onto the bag. Its claws are still sheathed and the boy is relieved because he couldn't bear it if the bag his mother painstakingly worked to buy is ruined. The boy pulls down experimentally, but the movement becomes rapid, almost like he is in gravity (but he isn't because his feet are still on the ground) and the creature jerks forward, landing on the boy. The boy grunts and watches with wide eyes as the paper slip he's cherished somehow slides out of his pocket.

He races after it, trying in vain to grab it, and it's flying away, flying away—

That tiny slip of something clearly means something to the thing, and it *had* just saved him, so Saesryc easily reaches out and plucks it from mid-air, squinting at it. His eyes widen at the address written, and he has half a mind to just march over to elderly Trinket and ask why in Labyrinth's name is his address written on this thing from another place, but there is a rough tug at his leg.

He looks down where the boy has extended a hand, and blinks, confused. The boy's eyes are fixed on the slip, and Saesryc even wonders if the boy can read it. This is one point that they can both share, if the boy can read it. He kneels down.

“Can you read this?”

The boy frowns in concentration and shakes his head.

“You can't?”

The boy shakes his head again, squinting up at Saesryc.

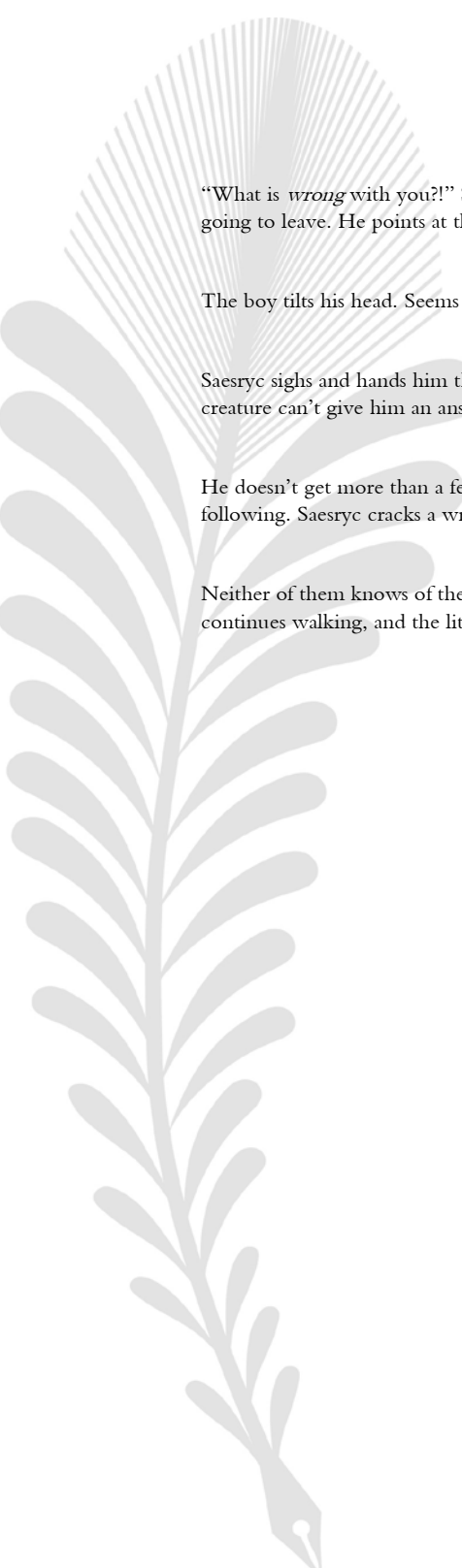
“I can take you there.”

The boy shakes his head.

“You don't want me to take you there?”

The boy reaches out for the paper, and Saesryc feels like an idiot. The boy probably doesn't even understand him. Alright, time for some acting.

He looks down at the boy, points at the paper exaggeratedly, then himself, and pretends to stride in a certain direction. Wrong move, because the boy whacks him with his weapon again and Saesryc nearly lets go of the slip.



“What is *wrong* with you?!” Saesryc hisses out in a pained breath. Maybe the thing thought he was going to leave. He points at the thing, points at himself and the paper, then gestures to the side.

The boy tilts his head. Seems to consider this.

Saesryc sighs and hands him the paper. He knows where elderly Trinket lives anyway. And since the creature can't give him an answer, he might as well go himself. He turns and marches off.

He doesn't get more than a few steps before he hears footsteps and turns to see the boy obediently following. Saesryc cracks a wry grin as the boy stops when he stops. Alright then.

Neither of them knows of the troubles they will face or the dangers that lie ahead. But for now, Saesryc continues walking, and the little tsunami-shadow follows.